BEM
32
The Comics News Fanzine
50p
$2.00
R.D.H
·80·
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editor & publisher: Martin Lock
assistant editor: Mike Taylor

BEM is published 5 times a year

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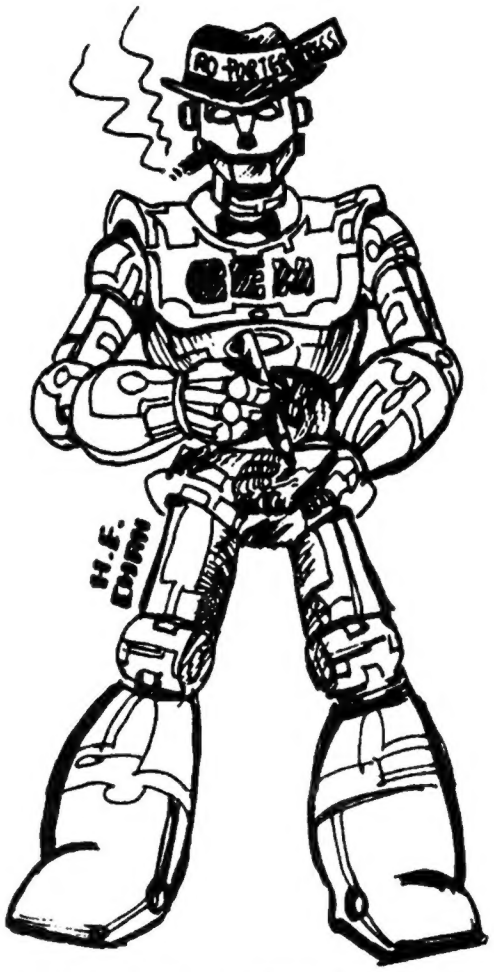
a 5-issue air mail subscription to Australia costs A$12.00, payable to George Lee. This is an amateur, non profit-making magazine. A full page advertisement, to be printed the same size from an A4 black & white original, costs £17--or in four colours from four b & w originals, £25. An area 4.9" wide by 7" high, on a page with no other illustrations, costs £10. Contributors are sent a complimentary copy of the issue their letter, art etc appears in--or if you subscribe, your subscription is extended by an issue...

NEWS AT BEM



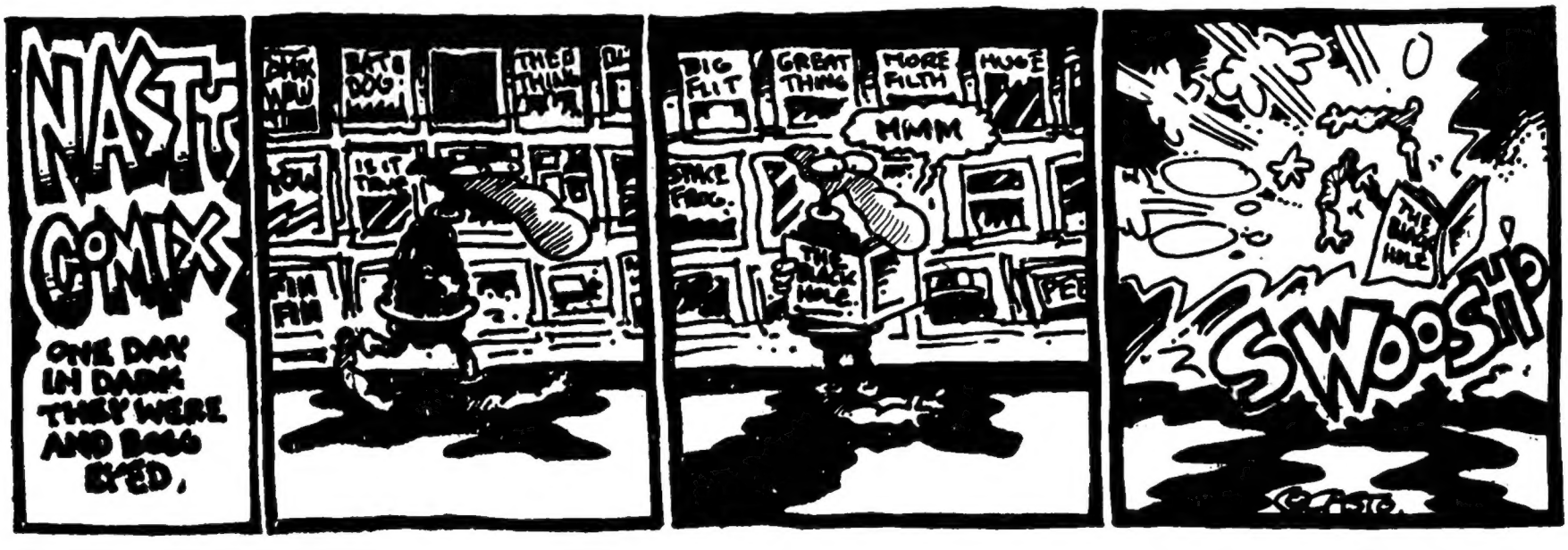
Well, H.M.S. Conqueror finally gets the cover of Bem, to celebrate the start of its second serial, which runs to three 5-page instalments; Dave Harwood has already finished this story, scripted by me, and also in stock is a 6-page story of Fl'ff and friends scripted & pencilled by Dave's friend Eddie Campbell, and inked by the busy Mr Harwood, who is now well advanced on a rather longer story--but more on that soon! My thanks of course go to Dave for pencilling the cover, and to Brian Bolland for finding time in his busy schedule to ink it, and for doing the colour separations too--except for yellow, which Dave did. Truly an epic collaboration, and, for those who follow such things, Bem's first four-colour cover. Cunning use of red, blue, yellow and black can produce any colour required, such as purple, green and brown -- take a magnifying glass to the cover, and you'll see how it's done.

This episode of the Conqueror series has an added bonus; you may find some of the characters in the background strangely familiar. I'm not saying what took me to the casino (well, all right--it was a number 38 bus!)--but Mike Cruden may have some explaining to do if Sue sees page nine. Some more familiar faces will be found in part three (unless the money's deposited in the usual place, fellas!).

I gather that Mike Taylor has had some good response from the joint issue, in terms of new subscribers, enquiries, and back issue orderers; we both have had a slightly lighter than usual letter response, due to the festive season and of course the two-way split, as the paths of Bem and Masters of Infinity diverge again. I'm glad that a good number of Bem readers have decided to try Masters of Infinity; if you haven't yet, it's not too late of course. MoI #5 is available by post for 35p--if you want the first 4 issues as well, add a further 80p. MoI #7 (the joint issue was #6) can be reserved for 40p, or a 5-issue subscription is £2.00. The address to send all your hard-earned loot to is 35, Fernhill Rd, Olton, Solihull, West Midlands -- and he'd like cheques etc payable to Mike Taylor, I imagine. MoI #7 should be out about a month after this Bem, with an interview with (and cover by) Mike McMahon and the start of a strip serial starring a superhero created by me a while ago, and taken over now by Mike Collins and Mark Farmer. And for news fans, it will contain a full service of news provided through the resources of Bem--like the next 4 pages, in fact. As Masters of Infinity and Bem should be appearing roughly in alternate months (as Bem and Comic Media News International used to do), this doubling of the "Bem News Service" should keep everybody fully up to date on what's happening in comics from month to month.

Of course, since I've plugged Mike's back issues, it's only fair that I mention the remarkably fine reading material to be found in back issues of Bem; as listed in the left-hand column, 16 Bem back issues are available for £5.00 by post...or any five, including the five most recent ones, can be had for a mere £2.00! With the latest postal price rises, it's unlikely we can hold this offer for long, so unchain your wallet and treat yourself, right? Besides, we need the money...why, if enough people subscribe, or pick up back issues, you might see some inside pages of Bem in full colour.

Next Bem should have a cover by (and interview with) one of the top British comics artists; our new assistant editor was sent down to London recently to interrogate him. Mike's main duty this time is to help collate Bem; a glamorous & exciting job, but I'm generous--I don't mind giving someone else a share of it! -MARTIN LOCK



COMICS NEWS

Marvel are cutting down from 22 to 21 pages of story, and re-introducing the "Bullpen Bulletins" page, written by Roger Stern. This move, it's reckoned, will save over $60,000 a year. Some stories already completed may have a page edited out--in other cases, the letters page may be left out to give room for the 22nd page.

Michael Z. Hobson has been named to the newly-created post of vice president/publishing. In his new position, Hobson takes administrative responsibility for all functions related to Marvel publications, including editorial, marketing, and also production.

Hobson joins Marvel following 13 years with Scholastic Magazines Inc, where he was most recently vice president and publisher of their largest division, the Book Club Division. During his last two years at Scholastic, he took on the additional responsibility of launching Scholastic's paperback retail trade business.

This means that, for the first time, Jim Shooter now has a boss, instead of operating on his own and reporting direct to Jim Galton. Apparently, they're really tightening up the ship, particularly the administrative systems. Other than the trimming of a page off the comics, there hasn't been any effect on editorial contents yet; any unease in the Marvel office may be soothed by a general increase in page rates, and the offering of more money for contracts.

MARVEL PREMIERE and MARVEL SPOTLIGHT have been cancelled; projects that were being readied for use there will appear instead as mini-series, which means a lot of first issues to collect! It's possible that DR WHO may become a regular monthly comic, but this may depend on the fortunes of the TV series in America, where only the first four Tom Baker seasons are in syndication currently. If newer seasons are picked up by a new national cable TV network planned, his popularity would soar -- and the only remaining stumbling block (until they catch up on the British monthly) is Jim Shooter's dislike of the comic, it seems.

THE HULK! and HOWARD THE DUCK will end their black-and-white careers with issues #27 and #9. The feeling at Marvel was that

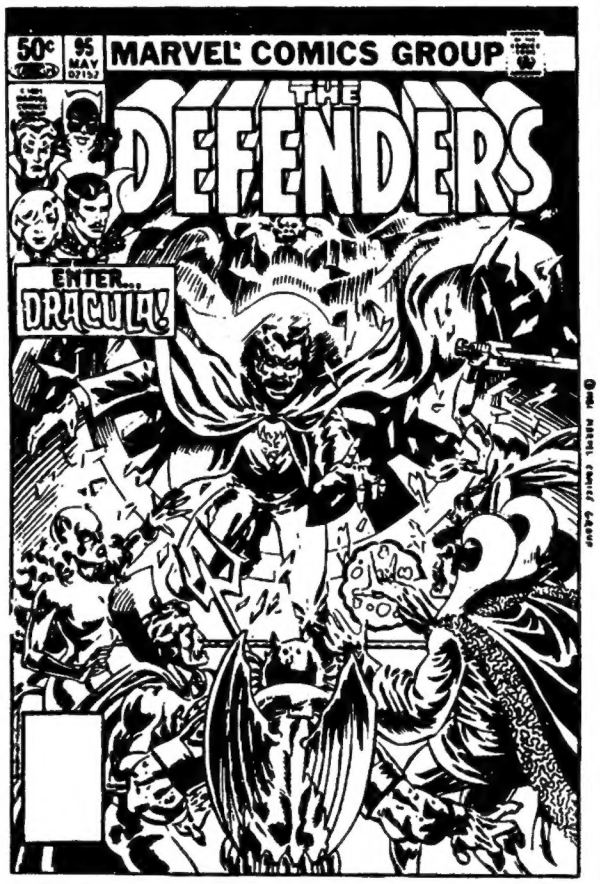
50¢ 14 JUNE
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
STAR TREK
I AM YOUR CAPTAIN NO LONGER! I AM THE HOLY AVATAR--AND I DECREE YOU SHALL PERISH!
JIM--THIS IS MARVELLA! WE'RE YOUR FRIENDS... YOUR FRIENDS!

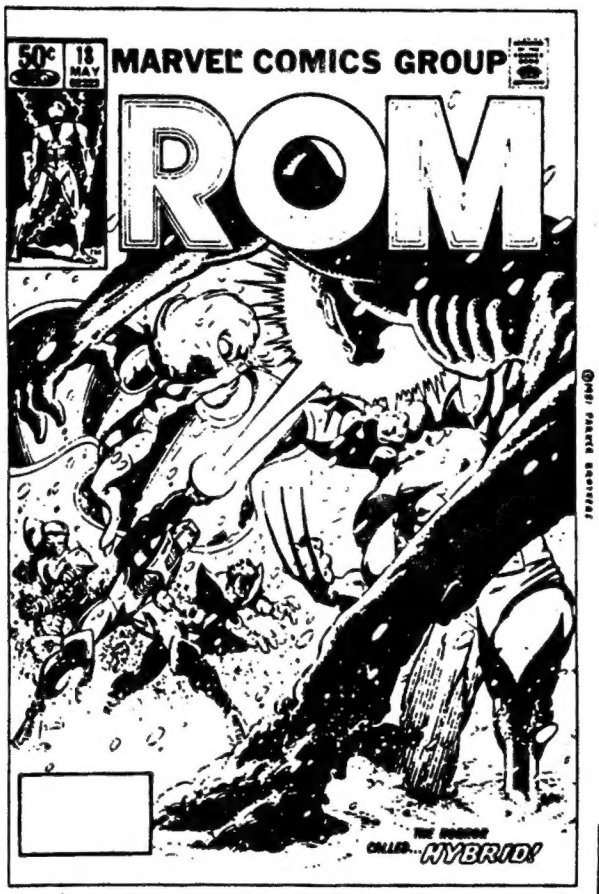
the books overlapped the audience for the regular line--who were considerably less adult than some of the material appearing in these magazines. For this reason, the HOWARD THE DUCK book will return to colour status, albeit as a quarterly, 48-pager. The final couple of HULK issues are all black and white, so the Dominic Fortune stories that were to appear in them will instead appear at some future date in MARVEL UNIVERSE, the EPIC-type super-hero magazine.

Marvel has licensed 3 movie properties for adaptation for summer of '81, two of which will definitely become monthly comic book series. The first, and most surprising, is FOR YOUR EYES ONLY, which will appear first as a full colour MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL magazine, and also three issues of the new JAMES BOND title, which will be done by Denny O'Neil, Frank Miller and probably Tom Palmer. The second film is the new George Lucas film, RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, the soldier-of-fortune period piece featuring a character named Indiana Jones which was directed by Steven Spielberg. It too will be adapted in magazine form, which will be the basis for the first three monthly issues of the comic book. Archie Goodwin and John Buscema are slated to do it, with Buscema (or Marie Severin, if John can't do it himself) inking. The third is the Paramount-Walt Disney production, DRAGONSLAYER, which probably won't become a series. Buscema will draw it, but no other creative personnel have been selected. -TCR

Terry Austin inked two issues of John Byrne's FANTASTIC FOUR before moving off the title for deadline reasons--John has now got married and moved to Evanston, Illinois. The new inker on FANTASTIC FOUR, written by John Byrne and pencilled by John Byrne, is...John Byrne! Terry may be reunited with John on SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, though (as of 22-1-81, and despite American newszine reports to the contrary) he has not yet made a decision on this.

Chris Claremont has signed a contract with Marvel, which calls for him to write about 2½ books per month, or the equivalent in movie treatments, albums etc. It means Marvel will have first refusal on any characters etc Chris creates.





As Frank Miller has taken on the JAMES BOND assignment, he won't be doing DOCTOR STRANGE--at least, not yet (he's committed only to that first movie adaptation at the moment). Therefore, Marshall Rogers is doing a couple of issues--if they work out okay (and he meets the deadlines), decisions will be made.

The title of MARVEL PREVIEW is being changed to BIZARRE ADVENTURES. #25 is the "Lethal Ladies" issue; #26 is "Kull: Demon in a Silvered Glass" by Doug Moench and Britain's own John Bolton (who painted the cover -- one previously completed by Joe Jusko will probably end up on SAVAGE SWORD); and after that comes "Kestrel Falconer", scripted by Lynn Graeme from a concept by artist Steve Bissette. Other projects include a horror issue starring Dracula, and perhaps Red Sonja drawn by Bolton. Most of the covers will be done by Paul Gulacy.

The SPIDER-MAN/SUPERMAN (to switch the billing for once) treasury is finally completed, and is in the process of being proofread by DC and edited by Sol Brodsky for the paperback version (which is the first we've heard of THAT). The Batman/Hulk book is in the plotting stage at the moment, over at DC. -TCR

J. Marc DeMatteis's third issue of THE DEFENDERS will alter the tone and focus of the book completely, as it switches from super-heroics to the realm of horror and the occult. Son of Satan will become a regular Defender, Nighthawk and Hellcat will be altered gradually (although the changes will be major), and a new Defender will appear as of #94: The Gargoyle. They will battle a coalition of demons called The Six-Fingered Hand, and horror guest stars will begin appearing. #95 features Dracula, #96 Ghost Rider, #97 Demon-Slayer, #98 Man-Thing, and #99 Satana. #100 will be a double-sized issue, which has yet-to-be announced contents. The art will be done by Don Perlin (layouts) and Joe Sinnott (finished art).

Conan will meet his old friend Murillo from "Rogues In The House" in #122-125, as well as acquiring a new band of travelling compenions: a pair of youthful wanderers named DukenRik and Jonnwalli, and a giant mute named Atreah. -TCR

MARVEL UNIVERSE is still unscheduled; it's to run to 100 pages, covers included; 32 interior pages are black & white, and 64 full colour. MARVEL FANFARE (SHOWCASE?) may be used to present some old, unused inventory; a ten-year-old X-Men story by now-DC editors Len Wein & Ross Andru is available, if somebody can write & draw part two, its conclusion; there's also a Spider-Man/Scarlet Witch Marvel Team-Up story, written by Mike W. Barr & assigned to artist Sandy Plunkett over 2 years ago, which now doesn't fit the continuity...

There will be a crossover between the ROM and POWER MAN/IRON FIST books, with the characters from each appearing in the other -- but both stories will be related though separate. -TCR

The albums of new material are proceeding as planned. Following the death of Captain Marvel issue, there will be the long-finished ELRIC story by Roy Thomas & Tim Conrad. And the PRISONER album is moving ahead with Roger Stern scripting and Walt Simonson inking the Jack Kirby pilot book, and Steve Englehart and Steve Leialoha finishing up the Gil Kane story. -TCR

SPIDER-WOMAN and STAR TREK are going bi-monthly--May is the first month they miss. SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP #18 is cancelled.

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #11 (March) was the final issue; PREMIERE reaches #60.

Instead of starting a three-issue mini-series, the 25-page "Doorway to Nightmare" story by Steve Englehart & Marshall Rogers "Dance For Two Demons" will be appearing in a one-shot comic, MADAME XANADU #1. The comic will have 32 pages, plus covers (the front cover is by Mike Kaluta), and also a special pull-out poster on coated stock featuring a pin-up of Madame Xanadu drawn by Kaluta especially for this issue. The "spare" seven pages are given over to a fantasy story by J.M. DeMatteis and Brian Bolland (taken from the MYSTERY IN SPACE inventory). The comic will not be Code-approved; it will only be sold by direct sale outlets (i.e. as an "import"); and it will have a cover price of $1.00.

MYSTERY IN SPACE and SUPER FRIENDS are cancelled; the last issue of MiS to appear was #117 (March), while SF ends with #47 (August), to use up the stories already completed. This leaves Plastic Man and E. Nelson Bridwell's international heroes homeless--and also gives Julius Schwartz the time to increase the frequency of SUPERMAN FAMILY to monthly with #208.

Stories scheduled for MYSTERY IN SPACE, but not published, are: #118: "Falling

Down to Heaven" by DeMatteis and Bolland (presumably the story added to MADAME XANADU #1), "A Little Knowledge" by Bruce Jones & Tom Sutton; "Jasper Pepperdyne, Defender of Time & Space" by Barr & Garcia Lopez; and "Escape Proof" by Joe Cavalieri Von Eeden & Potts. #119: "The Trouble With Air" by Conway & Mike Zeck (his debut at DC), "Captain Spaceman Will Be Waiting" by Mishkin & Cohn; "A Day Without Sunshine" by Roger McKenzie & Spiegle; and "Return of the Wanderer One" by Barr & Von Eeden. For #120, Tom Sutton, Steve Ditko, Martin Pasko, Curt Swan and Murphy Anderson had been announced as among the contributors.

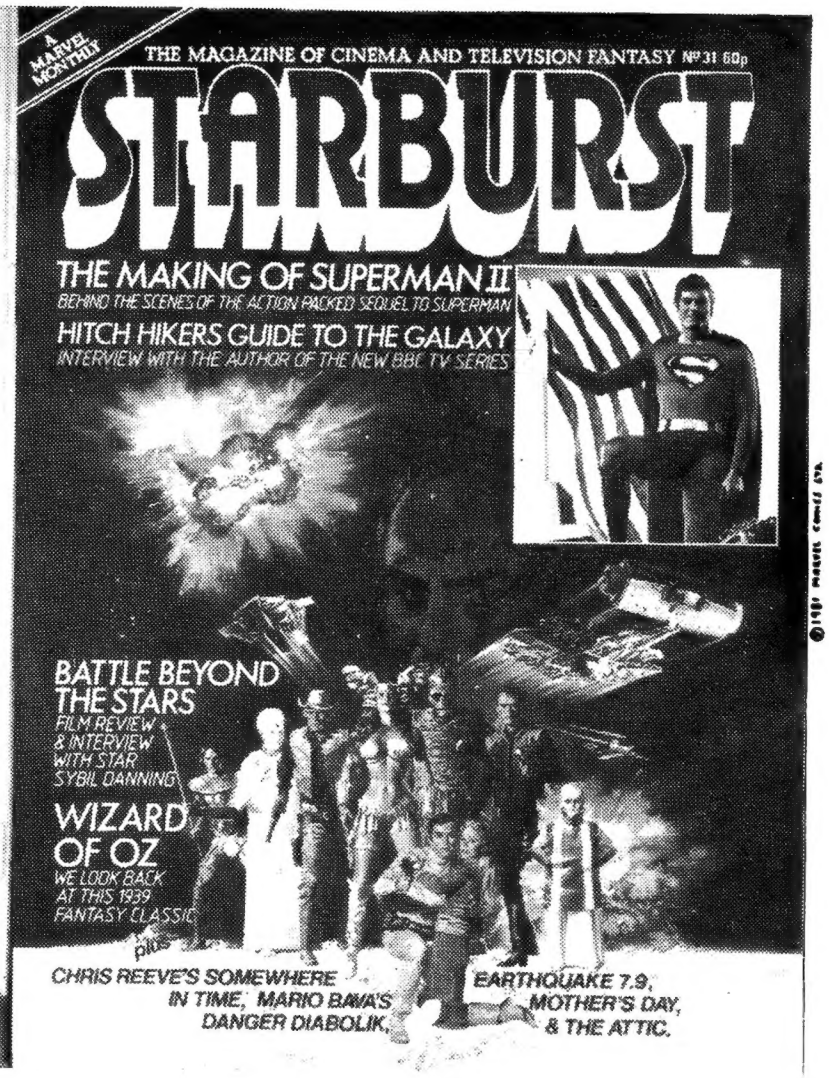
Jack C. Harris has given up his public relations and editorial responsibilities to become Assistant Foreign Sales Manager for DC's Export Division. He'll be directly involved in the worldwide sale and distribution of DC's properties to over two dozen foreign publishers. (Thanks for all your help, Jack, and good luck!) Andy Helfer is the new public relations man--a full-time position. Jack's editorial responsibilities are split as follows:

Mike W. Barr, besides working as assistant to Len Wein on his books (ADVENTURE, ALL-STAR SQUADRON, NEW TEEN TITANS, GREEN

LANTERN, THE JLA, WORLD'S FINEST, and WONDER WOMAN at present), is now editor of WEIRD WAR TALES, LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES, THE FLASH, and also UNKNOWN SOLDIER.

Also, Cary Burkett is to take charge of GHOSTS, UN.E XPECTED, and SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE, while helping Dick Giordano on the 3 Batman books and Roy Thomas's new b a r b a r ian comic.

Neal Adams is talking to DC about him doing a new book for them --reportedly involving no DC or brand-new hero, but a licensing operation.


A MARVEL MONTHLY
THE MAGAZINE OF CINEMA AND TELEVISION FANTASY №31 60p
STARBURST
THE MAKING OF SUPERMAN II
BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE ACTION PACKED SEQUEL TO SUPERMAN
HITCH HIKERS GUIDE TO THE GALAXY
INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR OF THE NEW BBC TV SERIES
BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS
FILM REVIEW & INTERVIEW WITH STAR SYBIL DANNING
WIZARD OF OZ
WE LOOK BACK AT THIS 1939 FANTASY CLASSIC
plus
CHRIS REEVE'S SOMEWHERE IN TIME, MARIO BAVA'S DANGER DIABOLIK,
EARTHQUAKE 7.9, MOTHER'S DAY, & THE ATTIC.

Roy Thomas will do the writing for LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES rather than BATMAN, as he wished to have full control over the characters he wrote, which he could not do with Batman. His replacement is Gerry Conway, who swapped LSH with Roy. Roy's other books are pretty well on the way. ALL-STAR SQUADRON, the new name for the wartime adventures of various Earth-Two superheroes, including E-2 counterparts of Quality characters, is one title--it will begin with #1, following a 16-page insert story in JUSTICE LEAGUE #193 by Thomas & Buckler. DC is awaiting clearance before announcing the title and artist of the barbarian book Roy created--its preview should be in WARLORD #48, the same month as the ALL-STAR preview. -TCR/M

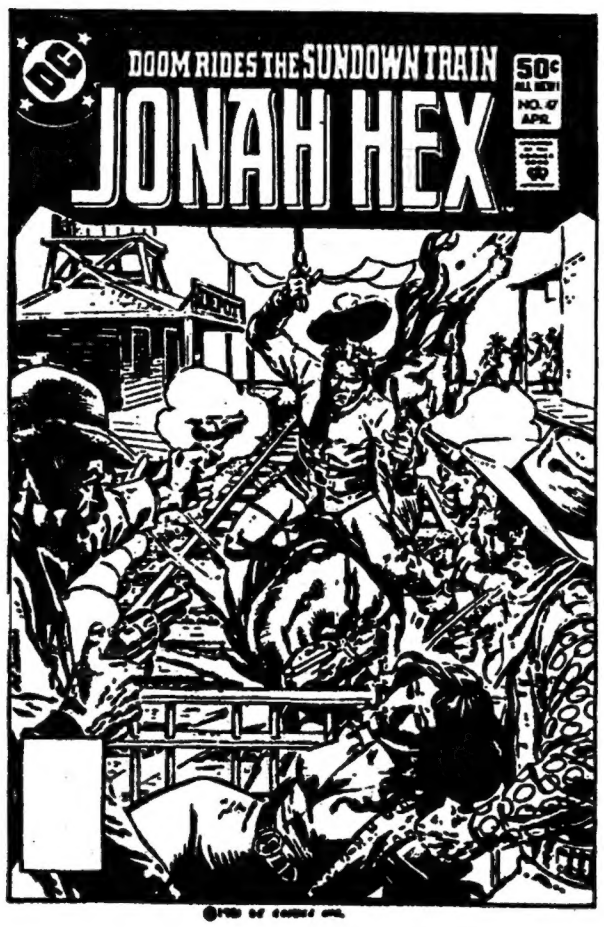
It's possible Mike Grell may leave his creation, WARLORD -- he's becoming more and more dissatisfied with the inking which, apart from a recent 2-issue respite, is by Vince Colletta, despite Mike's repeated requests for a more sympathetic inker.

The Warlord Digest(DC SPECIAL DIGEST #10) is a 93-page edit job (by Laurie Sutton) of parts of the first 10 episodes of the strip, eliminating the repetition. Mike Grell did a new wrap-around cover for it. -TCR/M

Along with the tabloid counterpart to the SUPERMAN II movie, which is being done by Joe Orlando and Mike Fleisher and will be out in May, as a new tabloid comic album called SECRETS OF THE FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE. It will be edited by Len Wein and pencilled by Ross Andru, and it too will appear to coincide with the film's release. -TCR

SWAMP THING will be a new movie in 1982 for Polygram and Universal Pictures, produced by Michael Uslan & Ben Melniker, and written (featuring the characters & concepts from the first ten issues of the Wein and Wrightson comic) & directed by Wes ("The Hills Have Eyes" and "Last House on the Left") Craven. Producer Uslan says that the direction of the film will seek to create for the audiences the kind of pathos that such classic films of the 30's as "Mighty Joe Young"; photography will begin on location on March 1st in the southeastern USA.

Both Carmine Infantino and Don Heck will pencil "Dial H For Hero" stories beginning with ADVENTURE #483. -TCR



The British Marvel weekly VALOUR is to finish after 19 or 20 issues -- it will merge into FUTURE TENSE. A new weekly will appear on February 19th, CAPTAIN AMERICA; the first 3 issues have stickers as free gifts, while strips featured include Dazzler, Iron Man, and the Defenders.

STAR WARS MONTHLY #143-144 contains a re-drawn story originally done for an unpublished John Carter Annual; it may not be used in America...

DR WHO MONTHLY #50 includes a free gift: a pull-out wall-chart featuring an episode guide and pictures of the first four Doctors.

STARBURST is being exported to the States, starting with #32, for direct sales outlets only, with a $2.00 cover price. There will also be a Starburst Annual this year, plus RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK (reprinting the Marvel Super Special), EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (the 2 Al Williamson stories upcoming), and CAPTAIN AMERICA, X-MEN, SPIDER-MAN, and HULK. These last four contain classic stories by Steranko, Adams, Ditko & Kirby respectively, selected by Paul Neary -- they too will go to America, appearing as a monthly album series in specialist stores for four months from mid-summer.

After the 2-part "Tharg and the Revenge of the Thrill-Suckers" by John Howard and Ian Gibson in 2000AD progs 198 & 199, Strontium Dog returns in prog 200 with "Portrait of a Mutant", which runs to at least 8 parts. It recounts Johnny Alpha's origins and boyhood. The Grover/Smith "Pirates of the Black Atlantic" 4-parter concludes then; and, as you can see from the Robin Smith cover, a brand new poster scheme, to be spread over 6 back pages, begins, drawn by Dave Gibbons. It features pretty well every 2000AD character to date, in six sections. One's devoted to Green-Bonce, the others to future war (Bill Savage, ABC Warriors, VCs), space travel (Jim DiGriz, BlackHawk, Dan Dare), mutants (Strontium Dog, Artie Gruber, Mach-0), cities and cultures (Judge Dredd and his cast, Nemesis etc), and robots.

Prog 200 also has a Tharg story by John Wagner, Alan Grant and Carlos Ezquerra: "Tharg at the Party". Any similarities to the 2000AD Christmas office party are only too likely!

The new Pat Mills & Kev O'Neill "Nemesis" series won't begin in prog 200; it's being held back for a while until more episodes are completed.

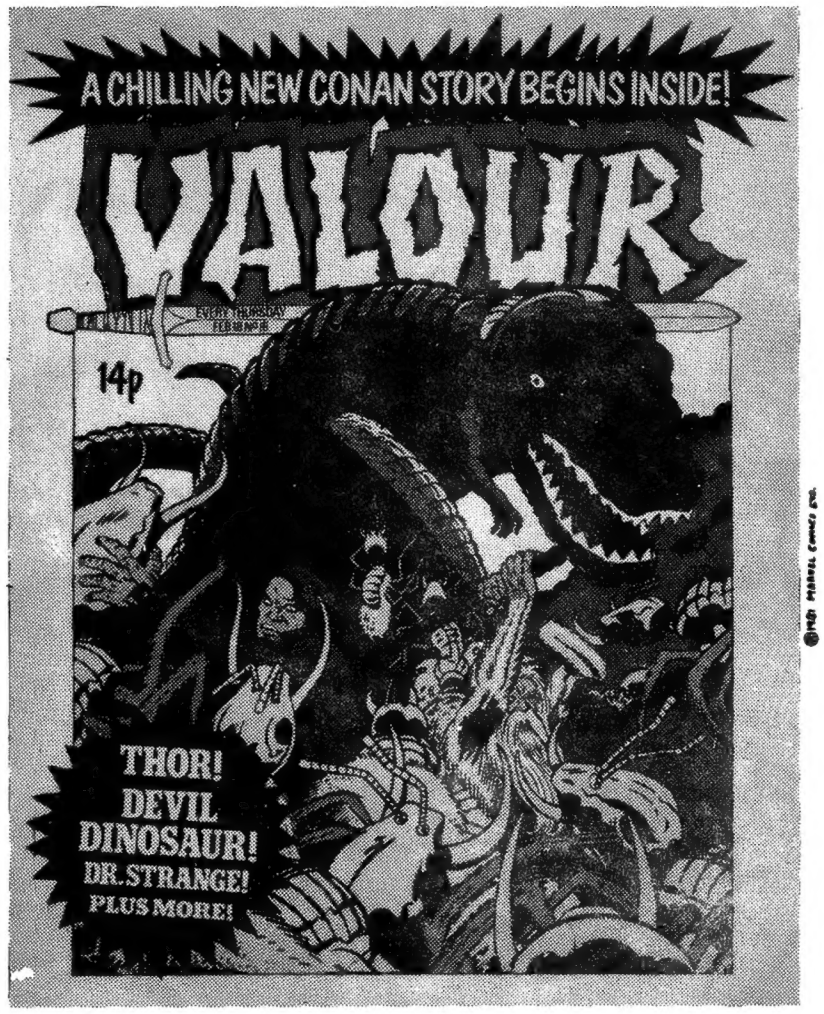
Prog 201 has a one-part Dredd story by Grover and Emberton (Ian Gibson), based on the idea of a TV game in which criminals confess to their crimes: "Any Confessions"!

"Mean Arena", which had 2 episodes drawn by Steve Dillon (for progs 199 & 200), may be rested after prog 202, for revamping & rescheduling -- so we can expect to see the return of the Mighty One's "Future Shocks" for a while. Prog 202 has a Strontium Dog cover by Ezquerra.

The Sci-Fi Special should be out in late April.

Since the Dan Dare TV series has been put back a year, the Dan Dare Annual that was being worked on has been suspended -- as has the projected Dan Dare weekly comic. A presentation page for ATV's press kit drawn by Brian Bolland (see Bem-31) was reprinted in 2000AD prog 197, along with production sketches by Brendan McCarthy and Brett Ewins. The art side of the TV production is still going on.

Permission has been obtained from Harry Harrison for a new Stainless Steel Rat series; it won't be an adaptation of one of Harry's novels--it will be original material, written by Kelvin Gosnell.



STUDIO SYSTEMS, the publishing, design & art consultancy team headed by Dez Skinn and Graham Marsh, along with the STARBURST contributor Tony Crawley, is continuing its work for the film industry. "Additional to our series of Columbia media booklets we are producing on individual feature films, we have several publishing projects in the works that should prove interesting," Dez reports. "A feature magazine, a regular comic book, an adaptation of a fantasy film into strip form, and a full colour artwork film poster."

Dez promises to tell us more on each "as (if) they get the green light." And, regarding the "Speedmaster" comic produced for Scalextric, it's too early to say whether a second issue will be produced--"but the signs are good that next Christmas's promotion of the Scalextric product will take the character a step further into marketing, through TV ads and possibly into actual product, as part of the Scalextric range."

And a feature in the "Marketing Matters" section of SCREEN INTERNATIONAL reveals that "Skinn and Marsh are currently preparing a book called 'Frame to Frame', which looks at the relationship between comics and movies." It all sounds fascinating; stick with The Bem News Service for developments as they happen!

Moving back across the Atlantic, SCHANES AND SCHANES have sent news of upcoming portfolios. "Elfquest: A Gallery Of Portraits" by Wendy Pini (an edition of 2000) was shipped out in January, with almost all copies pre-sold. Also for January release was "The Seven Dreams of Sinbad" by Frank Cirocco (1200 copies), with one of the plates in colour. The retail price is $20.00.

February brings "The Forgotten Beasts of Eld" by Alicia Austin (1500 copies, $15.00 retail)--based on the book by Patricia A. McKillip. "Lela Dowling's Unicorns" is a sequel to her beautiful 1980 "Dragons" portfolio (1200 copies, at $12.00); and due out in February or March is "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by underground comix artist Greg Irons, based on Coleridge's classic verse. It has 6 plates, and will be a very limited edition at 750 copies, with a retail price of $12.00.

Portfolios are available from a number of British shops and dealers--or the address of Schanes And Schanes is P.O. Box 99217, San Diego, California 92109, USA.

CEREBUS is now $1.50 an issue, due to increased production costs. SWORDS OF CEREBUS comes out at the same time as CEREBUS #24, at $5.00, reprinting the first four issues along with a new 7-pager by Dave Sim & Marshall Rogers.

In case you hadn't noticed, no February or March cover-dated Marvel comics have been distributed at 15p in Britain. April cover-dates onwards are being distributed by Comag at 20p. All 50 cent titles except STAR WARS, MARVEL SUPER-HEROES, and TEAM-UP should appear; the exceptions are due to British Marvel books with the same name, so TEAM-UP will presumably be replaced by CAPTAIN AMERICA soon.

More news next month, in MASTERS OF INFINITY #7. -ML

castle in the air

C.6

WRITTEN BY: MARTIN LOCK

RDH '80

WE'D TAKEN HMS CONQUEROR TO THE FURBANK SYSTEM TO HAVE THE LANDING GEAR, DECIDEDLY DENTED ON OUR LAST LANDFALL, PUT TO RIGHTS. THE WORK WAS BEST DONE IN ZERO GRAVITY--AND THIS WAS WHERE THE BEST SPACE-WORKERS WERE!

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS SET-UP, LIEUTENANT?

I'D HEARD OF THE 'ST. MORGAN HOTEL IN ORBIT,' FRANK, AND IT CERTAINLY IS AN... INTRIGUING PLACE.

IT'S MORE THAN THAT, FL'FF; THIS IS ONE OF THE MAIN PLEASURE SPOTS OF THE OUTER TERRITORIES.

AND ALL OUR WATCH HAD 4-DAY PASSES, AND FIVE MONTHS' PAY TO SPEND. I'D CALCULATED, IF I TOOK A SMALL ROOM AND WENT BACK TO THE SHIP FOR MEALS, MY PAY WOULD JUST ABOUT LAST THE DISTANCE...

A CURIOUS PLACE FOR THE SAUCER-MEN TO OPERATE FROM, LUKE?

I THINK THEY OWN IT, FL'FF. THERE'S MONEY IN SPACESHIP REPAIR, AND THERE'S MONEY IN LEISURE, TOO.

I CAN'T GET USED TO THEM, SOMEHOW. HALF MAN, HALF MACHINE... THEY'RE JUST NOT...

HUMAN?

1

FL'FF, I DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING...

OH, QUIETEN DOWN, YOU TWO. WE'RE HERE TO ENJOY OURSELVES! FRANK YOU KNOW THE DRINKS SCENE. WILL YOU ORDER FOR US?

A PLEASANT PLACE TO STAY WHILE THE CONQUEROR'S REPAIRED, CAPTAIN.

TOO GAUDY FOR ME, COMMODORE. BUT LEAVING THE SHIP FOR A FEW DAYS SHOULD BE GOOD FOR US ALL.

I CERTAINLY HOPE SO. AND I'M RELYING ON YOUR SECURITY PEOPLE TO KEEP EVERYONE PEACEFUL. THE LAST THING WE NEED IS A COMPLAINT FROM THE MANAGEMENT ENTERED INTO THE BLUE COMMAND LOG!

SO NO TROUBLE, CAPTAIN RUSSELL. YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE!

YES, SIR. BUT I'M GOING TO RELAX, TOO.

FRANK, WHAT *ARE* YOU CARRYING?

THE SPECIALITY OF THE HOUSE, FAIR LADY --YOU MUST ADMIT IT *LOOKS* PRETTY GOOD!

I'M ADMITTING NOTHING TILL I TASTE IT, CORPORAL.

2

LIEUTENANT, YOU'LL *LOVE* IT --I HOPE. IT'S RICH IN VITAMINS, WITH SUBTLE HERBS, A DASH OF ORANGE JUICE, PURE MALVERN ICE, THE LEAVES OF THE CEMNI PLANT...

SECTOR CHIEF

AND ABOUT NINETY PARTS ROCKET FUEL, PEOPLE. NICE GOING, FRANK!

BUT WHILE WE SPLIT UP, BOOKED INTO OUR ROOMS, AND PREPARED FOR AN EXPENSIVE EVENING, AS EVER OUR CAPTAIN WAS WHERE THE ACTION WAS.

YOU'RE THE *CAPTAIN* OF THAT MASSIVE DREADNOUGHT?

WELL, ONE OF THEM, MISS GRAY.

Oh, *DO* CALL ME CARLYLE. I'M A CAPTAIN TOO, BUT IT'S JUST A LITTLE SPACE-YACHT MY FATHER GAVE ME. IT'S ROBO-CONTROLLED, AND VERY FAST--BUT IT'S TINY, ESPECIALLY COMPARED TO THE CONQUEROR.

YOU CAN GAMBLE ANYTHING HERE, CAPTAIN; THERE'S EVEN AN ORGAN-BANK SOMEWHERE IN THE HOTEL, FOR THAT ONE FINAL THROW...

I *NEVER* GAMBLE, CARLYLE.

OH, BUT YOU *MUST*, MY FRIEND...

3

AND ON *THAT* NOTE, LET'S LEAVE THE EVENTS OF THAT EVENING--AND MOVE ON TO THE RESULTS, THOUGH I STILL SHUDDER ABOUT WHAT I GOT PERSUADED INTO DOING.

I MEAN, I'M AN OBSERVER, NOT A LEADING CHARACTER, THOUGH I DO WHAT I CAN. SO HOW COME I END UP BEHAVING LIKE ONE?

YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE! THE BATTLECRUISER CONQUEROR HAS NOW PASSED INTO THE OWNERSHIP OF THIS HOTEL. ALL CREW MEMBERS INSIDE THE HOTEL ARE ASKED TO STAY AWAY FROM THE VESSEL UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

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WHAT THE DICKENS!?

FRANK! WHAT'S GOING ON?

I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE ON THIS CORRIDOR, FRANCIS MY MAN!

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OBVIOUSLY, MY FRIEND. BUT WE APPEAR TO HAVE A PROBLEM, IF THE SHIP'S BEEN TAKEN OVER BY THE LOCAL HOTEL PEOPLE.

BECAUSE HERE ON THEIR OWN TERRITORY, THE HOTEL PEOPLE ARE THE LAW, RIGHT?

RIGHT! I THINK WE NEED TO FIND THE CAPTAIN!

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AND OFF WE DASHED. WHAT A WAY TO START THE DAY!

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UNFORTUNATELY, IT WOULD SOON GET WORSE...

4

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON, BUT WE NEED TO GET BACK TO THE SHIP. WE'VE GOT THE SHUTTLE HERE, WHICH CAN CARRY TWENTY OF US---

AIRLOCK

---HOWEVER, THEY'LL BE WAITING FOR US. AH, FRANK, I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU.

THE FEELING IS MUTUAL...

TELL ME, IS YOUR SPACE-SUIT STILL ON BOARD THE SHUTTLE?

ER... WELL... YES..

A MAN'S SPACE-SUIT IS TAILOR-MADE, PERSONAL

FRANK

AND WHILE THERE WERE OTHER SUITS IN THE SHUTTLE, THEIR OWNERS WERE ALL BACK ON THE CONQUEROR.

SO THERE WAS NO WAY OUT--IT WAS HERO TIME!

FRANK

INTO THE SHUTTLE, AND OUT THROUGH THE FORWARD HATCH, THEN SPACE-WALK OVER TO THE CONQUEROR AND FIND OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING..

RIGHT AWAY, CAPTAIN.

FRANK

AND NEXT TIME, I'LL TELL YOU HOW I GOT ON!

It is well documented that Fiction House was successful in the 1940s because of the racy covers their comic books presented. As a natural transition from the pulp magazines that the publisher sold during the 20s and 30s, my guess is that this formula was motivated by a need to get into the field as quickly as possible. Thus they used their staff artists and writers in a different direction, a pictorial rather than a written one. There was the soon-familiar luscious brunette clad in leopardskin, caught in the trunk of a giant elephant as her hero-lover Ki-Gor pounced on the huge mammal, knife in teeth and muscles rippling. And there was the "Black Amazon of Mars", a spectacular redhead in the sort of tight-fitting black costume that the disco dancers of today would wear. These were typical of the covers for Jungle Stories and Planet Stories in the pulp heyday. Fiction House re-used these cover ideas for years, and established the cannon fodder with which Frederic Wertham would later become infamous in comic collecting circles.

By today's standards, these feminine depictions would seem bland, thanks to a new genre of artists who cannot restrain themselves when they reach the bustline. Every girl that John Romita draws would belie the statement that flat-chested girls do exist. But he and his contemporaries are latecomers to the Playboy anatomy school, Will Elder notwithstanding. In the mid 60s Wally Wood held forth as the chief artist for Tower Comics. He had a field day, exercising his style for those mail-order pieces he still does. The Smithsonian would like to have the suit of armour worn by the Iron Maiden, and Lois Lane could never match some of Len Brown's girlfriends curve for curve.

Wally Wood's biographical notes in the 1972 National Cartoonist's Society album read: "Born in Menahga, Minnesota, 1927. Decided to be a cartoonist at age two. Didn't get to it for another twenty years. In between was a dental laboratory worker, printer, pin setter, factory worker, etc. Joined Merchant Marine, then Army. Put in a term at Minneapolis School of Art. Decided they couldn't teach me anything. They had same idea. Went to Hogarth's C & I for a year or so on G.I. Bill, then got to work in comic books. Have done millions of 'em. Also children's books, toy boxes, gag cartoons, bubble gum cards, SF covers, a comic strip, illos for men's mags, and some advertising. I was in every issue of Mad Magazine for twelve years." However, it was Wood's work for Tower that gave him the deserved popularity he now enjoys. As a result of his stylish renditions of Dynamo and company, his earlier EC works have become collector's classics; and any title today that contains Wood inks or pencils carries a large credit banner to attest to the quality to follow.

In today's comic book marketplace, any female worth her salt must don a costume and/or acquire a super-power. This was not Tower's bag. Its gals were 100% feminine, and without apparent hang-ups.

Tower Publications entered the comic book field in late 1965 with THUNDER AGENTS, and tried to stretch the cycle of their venture past 1969, albeit in vain, with reprints. Prior to this, Tower had published paperbacks, with stories ranging from spy and western themes to mystery and crime-fighting. Now comics freelancers found a new customer in the publisher. Mike Sekowsky, Gil Kane, Reed Crandall (possibly his last work), Al Williamson, Steve Ditko, Ogden Whitney, and Murphy Anderson all either pencilled or inked material--they all helped to fashion the unique "Women of T.H.U,N.D.E.R."

The Iron Maiden was to Dynamo, THUNDER's ranking star, what the Dragon Lady was to Terry & the Pirates. Sometimes good, sometimes bad. Often omnipotent, at other times subservient to a higher authority. Compliments must be given, however, to her armourer. Moulded to the famous Wood manikin, I.M.'s metallic costume was the salient point of her characterization. Appearing in the first issue as the Warlord's female lieutenant, her egotism became immediately evident when Dynamo was taken captive. Mixing feminine liberation with an inner motivation for power, her many appearances revealed a softness that always kept her a step or two away from achieving such a goal. In issue #4, while in the service of Doctor Death, she was instrumental in placing Dynamo in peril, and then proceeded to save his life during an underground cave-in, getting wounded in the process. In issue #7 we meet her for the first and only time sans costume (in plain clothes, that is), a beautiful redhead ("My friends call me 'Rusty'") who once again lures Dynamo into a trap so that a duplicate could frame him as the perpetrator of numerous crimes. The story ends with Dynamo preventing her capture, so as to allow the mystique of their relationship to remain in question.

This scenario was to be repeated in other confrontations, as I.M. found herself in the employ of whatever reigning super-evil organization happened to be challenging T.H.U.N.D.E.R. at the time--or sometimes on her own. Humour would be injected once in a while, as witnessed by the "THUNDER Agent Weed" feature in DYNAMO #4, when a potion caused the diminutive Squad member to fall in love with the metallic maid in her attempt to organize a new gang. Who she really was is never revealed (although I suspect she may be Kathleen Glancy); other than being called "Rusty", she was to remain an enigma.

The nature of T.H.U.N.D.E.R.'s organization mandated a headquarters-office type of atmosphere. No self-serving editor would deny such a situation the prototype beautiful secretary/love interest of the leading hero. Here it was brunette Alice Robbins, right-hand girl of the Agents' immediate superior, Chief Short. Alice pops in and out of most issues, sometimes being captured by the enemy and saved by the organizational heavies. Then there are the light moments of office jealousy, humour, and a rare moment of socializing over a dinner table. Except for a brief display of judo, Alice remained the same throughout the 26-issue run of the trilogy of titles (THUNDER AGENTS, DYNAMO, and NOMAN) -- a voluptuous figure designed to fit the situation when a "Perils of Pauline" plot was needed to flesh out the major portion of the script. With the exception of Kitten, Alice Robbins could claim the most appearance credits of any distaff entrant in the series.

Kathryn (Kitten) Kane, described on her profile card as the technical expert of the mini-group, an inventor and scientist in her own right, was a former science teacher at the Institute of Technology, had served in various U.N. peace missions, and was a judo expert. Kitten made more cover appearances (4) than any other T. Squad member, if one discounts Guy Gilbert in the guise of Lightning. Romanticists will be quick to mention the personal relationship between Kitten and Guy, the then squad leader, throughout the run. In issue 10 she had her only solo story, in which she wounded Weed during a brief adventure on a tropical island. Throughout, she gave the impression of being a reliable, efficient agent, playing many rôles in disguise, including once in a Dynamo costume and another time as Len (Dynamo) Brown's wife, complete with a falsified wedding that left the unknowing Alice Robbins in a complete state of shock. I was disappointed when the ill-fated Menthor's helmet was never recovered --Kitten could have inherited it, and graduated to being a full-fledged superheroine. She had all the credentials.

Aside from the Iron Maiden, two other ranking villainesses deserve mention--Satana, and Mayven. Satana was Demo's mistress of sorts, first appearing in issue 1 when Noman had his first encounter with Demo's sub-men. Satana could best be described as a comic book version of the inevitable "B" movie decoration that most criminals required to fulfil their picturesque type-casting. In issue 19 she became the catlike, green skintight-clad leader of "The All-Girl Gang", ending her infamous career by having herself belted out by Kitten during a story ending confrontation. In Mayven however, we have a dyed-in-the-wool adversary with a touch of sorcery. Making frequent use of seemingly inanimate puppets, Mayven gave the last of the designated super agents, Raven, fits in their three meetings. Whenever captured, she escaped with the cynicism and assuredness of a mystical poetess as she chanted nursery rhymes.

KATHOLICITY

She worked for SPIDER, the evil network which succeeded the Warlords as THUNDER's main foe in the final 12 issues of T.A.

There were other females cast throughout the series. Some had fleeting, almost cameo appearances. There was Linda Rogers, a T.A. courier who posed as a disguised Noman's fiancée in issue 6. Carnaby Mod, a British Secret Service agent, appeared in issue 18 with Dynamo in an adventure entitled "Secret of the Abominable Snowmen". Carnaby had a heavy, Soho accent and a devil-may-care, smiling attitude which endeared her to readers in her only appearance. If THUNDER had gone international in their recruitment, she would have been a fine addition to the Thunder Squad. In issue 5, Menthor encountered the lovely Danara, daughter of the Lama killed by a foe named "The Entrancer" so that the Red Ruby of Tibet, with its power to transform the mental images of the holder into life-like visions, could be his. A lovely, dark-haired maiden of fine Indian-like quality, she came out of some Arabian Nights story to add depth to the oft-used plot, which took place mostly in a temple. Roxanne Short, the Chief's daughter, added interest to the love life of Len Brown by injecting jealousy into his relationship with the aforementioned Alice Robbins. She made frequent appearances in the later issues -- though I thought she was an unneeded personality. And Raven took time out from his encounters with Mayven to work with Senorita Rivera, a Mexican intelligence agent, to suppress a neo-nazi movement south of the border.

Unlike Marvel, Tower was able to inject its stable of girls frequently into everyone's stories without any problem. These were not appearances of dire need or calamity -- they did their thing, good or bad, in unhurried yet purposeful manner. This fluidity was a positive trademark of the entire series. The main characters, whether in their own stories or entering others, seemed to belong. The editor did not make their appearances look like important guest-starring rôles in someone else's territory. The women of Tower will not be at the top of the listings of female standouts, but few of their peers have added such important adhesion to a story as they did. -HOWARD P. SIEGEL

Well, what do you think of it so far? The New Teen Titans, that is. The first thing that must be said is that it certainly isn't original. The characters are in fact about the most derivative bunch you'll find anywhere. Robin, Kid Flash, and Wonder Girl are derivative by their very nature -- their kid sidekick origins make it impossible for them to be otherwise. The (former) Beast Boy is an old character, and even when he was new his powers went right back to the shape-shifting Gods of mythology. His new name is more accurate, since he used to change into insects and fish as well as animals, but Marvel used the name Changeling first. I wonder if they'll consider protesting--their Changeling was, after all, a true shape-shifter (if he'd only been an illusionist, he'd have reverted to his true shape when he died), though apparently confined to human forms. Mind you, if Marvel got stroppy, DC might point out that Beast Boy, on his first appearance, was a pretty hostile and obnoxious personality, and that his name is Gar Logan, and accuse Marvel of having cribbed first.

Of the new characters, Cyborg is a compound of the Bionic Man and Robotman (the Cliff Steele one), especially as exemplified by Robotman's origin series, when he hated the Chief so much he was ready to kill him. (I always thought that making this hatred the result of a loose wire was unsatisfactory, since he had a perfectly logical reason for the feeling.) Starfire is half of Phoenix -- general physical appearance, power with pyrotechnic effects, and a touch of amorality--although of course she is an alien, and her readiness to kill may be (probably, from her origin story, is) perfectly ethical by the standards of her world. Her tendency to take sexual initiatives is also reminiscent of Jean Grey. And the other half of Phoenix is Raven -- psychic abilities, a 'bird' effect, and the same touch of amorality, since she has apparently brainwashed Kid Flash. (How she found his brain to do it is a mystery.) Even the villains are derivative, the Hive being very like Hydra.

But after all, comics are by their very nature derivative. All superheroes derive from either Superman or Batman, who in turn have their roots in mythology and adventure fiction. What matters is how well the stories are devised and handled --and on that basis, the N.T.T. is promising. It does have quite a strong story line, and we can hope for character development. If only they stop Cyborg's whining--and maybe bring back Beast Boy's old feelings of alienation for the Changeling. The colour-prejudiced people who used to dislike him for being green have not all become liberal, surely. One thing I really like is that for once all the really heavy power in the team is with the girls. We haven't yet seen Raven's full potential, but Starfire and Wonder Girl alone could probably wipe the floor with the four male members unassisted. Mind you, in view of the conspiracy against women I revealed recently, I doubt if this state of affairs will be allowed to continue.

And to conclude -- my theory on Raven's

identity. Because of her Starhawk-like "one who knows" attitude, I toyed with the notion that she is Aleta in disguise. And then there's the possibility that she is the Phantom Stranger's younger sister (his other sister is Madame Xanadu; look at how they spend Christmas together). But a better candidate presents herself. Does anyone remember Terri Bergstrom? Appeared in Robin's solo series in the early '70s, and had strong psychic powers. Dropped out of sight. Has certainly had time to go and train at The Temple Azarath, or with Azarath at The Temple (damn careless bit of syntax, Mr Wolfman), and to get herself scorned by the JLA. Terri had, in the original stories, divined Robin's identity -- and what is more, she also influenced his dreams, just as Raven did in the preview and #1. Then there's the point that Wonder Girl is again delving into the mystery of her origin, and her origin was at one time going to be tied in with that of Lilith. (I rejected Lilith herself as a possible identity for Raven, since she has been seen too recently and in circumstances too mundane for it to be her.) There was a link between Lilith and Terri -- they called each other cousin, though this was more because of a psychic affinity than a blood relationship, or so it seems.

I think (in case you hadn't gathered) that Raven is Terri.. Now that I've said that, they will undoubtedly print a wholly different origin for her. But their's won't be as good as mine, said she adding delusions of grandeur to her paranoia.

Ah...you'll have guessed that the above was written before I read NTT 4 and 5. I still think they missed a golden opportunity to tie in with past continuity. Unless, of course -- is it possible that at some point in the past Raven sojourned in the guise of a normal Earth-1 type girl, for some unfathomable reason of her own? Looking, perhaps, for some kin on her mother's side (Wonder Girl and Lilith both have no known origin) and, because she wished to keep the expedition secret from her father, disguising her physical appearance to appear as a pretty little blonde? In other words, while I was wrong about Raven being Terri, it may yet turn out that Terri was Raven. -KATHLEEN GLANCY

Quoth Mike and Ivo, "NEVERWHERE!"

The full and frank exchange of views between Ivo Steyn and Mike Cruden on the subject of Rich Corben's "Neverwhere" has run through the letter columns of Bem for quite a while now; but, to close down the subject, they've agreed to step outside for a moment. So, first a letter from Ivo to Mike:

A week or so ago I wrote a letter to Bem saying (among other things) that I didn't feel like saddling your successor with a debate that isn't his own. However, I think your comments in Bem-30's Reaction deserve a reply.

Very puzzling, your remarks. Puzzling, because it took me so much trouble to understand your point of view: I simply couldn't understand what you were saying at first! As you may have gathered, I do not hold a very high opinion of "Neverwhere", and hearing someone whose opinion I usually respect call it "...an excellent story, beautifully drawn, with adult interest" -- well, it sort of caused a "systems breakdown". Tilt.

Enough of the prologue, on with the meat of the argument:

First off, I think we should agree we are not talking about the violence and sex being gratuitous, but the <u>depiction</u> of violence and sex. Whenever violence occurs during a story (which is pretty often in comics. Violent medium), the artist faces the decision of how explicitly he should depict that violence. He can make two mistakes.

1. He can rob the violence of its reality; "make-believe" violence (that is now slowly vanishing from CCA-controlled comics, I think). This is a mistake, because it destroys the "ugliness" of the violence, making it antiseptical.
2. He can shove every last gory detail down your throat. This is just as bad because violence soon becomes grimly comical, and just as unreal as if he'd prettyfied it too much.

I think Corben, as do many other artists in the Warren stables, consistently makes mistake #2. When Den and Gel are wrestling I don't particularly care for a close-up of Den crushing Gel's genitalia. When Norl is killed by the Queen's troops, seeing his head splatter makes his death a lot less personal, a lot less touching, than when Corben had toned down the gore a bit. It's not that I'm overly squeamish, it's just that I don't see any point in this childish display of blood 'n' guts.

As for the sex, well, it's much the same dilemma. Undertoning a certain sex scene is overly coy, generally silly, and does not help the "sense-of-reality" one bit. On the other hand, I don't feel any particular desire to see every pore, every spurt and every moan in glorious close-up --and living colour, too! It makes me feel slightly like a voyeur, and it's usually totally unnecessary for the understanding of the story, too. I can only guess at Corben's motives for his explicit depiction of sex scenes. Childish thrills?

However, I also object to the sex scenes for a different reason: they don't fit into the plot, and therefore smack of being nothing more than decoration. There are three sex scenes in the book. Let's look at them in order.

1. Den & Kath. Hmm. Kath is awfully forward (no pun intended) for someone born during the Victorian era. She hasn't been in Neverwhere long from her statement, so gradual change of personality hasn't had time to occur. Her present character is unlikely for someone from 1892, but OK, I'm willing to give it the benefit of the doubt. I also dislike the "hero and heroine celebrate rescue and narrow escape by screwing like minks" cliché --but that has unfortunately assumed classic status. Tacky, yes. Unlikely, yes. Unoriginal, yes. Integral to the plot, no.
2. Den & the Queen. I can't find a clue that reveals that Den allowed himself to be seduced to give Kang the chance to steal the Loc-Nar (phew! I thought I'd never get out of that sentence.). This is only the Queen's immediate paranoid assumption. Den is an unwitting pawn of Kang, if anything. Again: tacky, in bad taste, yes. Integral to the plot, no.
3. Ard & Kath. I'm sorry, I'm unable to perceive Ard as a "frustrated little impotent creep". Look at pages 89-92 (in the Ariel/Ballantyne edition-- the scene where Kang surrenders the Loc-Nar, flees, and is punished). This is what Nietzshe called "the grandeur of insanity", and while that may be a quote from an unsavoury source, doesn't it sum up Ard well? Page 100, too. And think about Kath's behaviour: "Please, let me try again!" Followed closely by "Den, Den." Weird. Unlikely. Plot-disruptive!

These sex scenes make about as much sense as I do at 6am! So why are they there? I think they're there because Rich Corben likes drawing women with large tits "without their vests on." "Ah yesss, they sort of liven up the page, don't they?" Bah. Corben is an adolescent fool.

Finally, a word about the art. Corben has a fabulously developed airbrush technique, but his <u>drawing</u> leaves a lot to be desired. Heads are too big, lower legs too small, etc. And if he really spent ten years on Neverwhere, why all the silly, cutesy puns? (Nebroc, Uluhtc, Ard...)

Maybe I'm wrong and you're right, and if you think so, please tell me why. But I don't think so.

To which, Mike made this reply:

Thanks for the letter. After ceasing my association with Bem I almost felt as though I was in exile!

I still stand by the statement that "Neverwhere" was:

1. An excellent story--I enjoyed it; it had twists, development, a good plot, interesting characters, and good (but not great) scripting. Do you disagree with that bit?
2. Excellently drawn (or beautifully drawn, as I said originally)--Corben has pioneered the use of airbrush in comics, and nobody does it better. His figures aren't anatomically (?) correct, but his style is interesting, his facial expressions are good, and backgrounds and panel layout are very good.
3. And it has adult interest. Well, what's adult interest? A good, uncensored story plus good uncensored artwork?

I don't agree that an excessively blood & guts depiction of violence is ridiculous and unpleasant, as in S. Clay Wilson's graphics. But I don't think Corben's art is that excessive. I like to think in terms of analogies, and the closest analogy to Corben's work (in the cinema) is such films as "The Wild Bunch" or "Straw Dogs", wherein the blood & guts aspect of violence is shown but not dwelled upon (as opposed to the more outright horror/ shock films, wherein the blood & guts is the essence of the film). And similarly with the sexual content of Neverwhere, he said dismissively. Okay, perhaps the sex scenes weren't positively, definitely, undeniably integral to Neverwhere's plot (and perhaps I took a stand "to liven up Reaction" once too often), but I think they are. You don't. I do. You don't. And so on. Also, I think the book would be a lot <u>duller</u> without them, because women with large tits without their vests on are pleasurable to look at. I'm giving away secrets, I know, but I prefer to read a book which includes a spicy bit of soft porn fitting in snugly between the silky, soft... (perhaps I've read a little too much of it...) I think the sex scenes in N/w are integrated well into the plot development--as opposed to the sex scenes in "Jaws" and "Day of the Jackal" (the books, I'm referring to) which were horrendously out of place, probably because they were included at the insistence of the publisher.

And just because you've spent ten years on something doesn't mean you can't include a few silly puns in it. All work and no play, et cetera.

If you want to send this reply, plus your original letter, plus any reply to my reply you feel like making, to Bem, go ahead. I think that it makes interesting reading, though Martin may feel this discussion is now old hat.

How come your English is better than mine, but I can't speak a word of Dutch?

And the dialogue doesn't finish there; turn to page 24 for the conclusion!

Reaction

Simon Russell

Nostalgic, that's what this fanzine was. The age and experience of Bem, and the youth and comic-iness (?) of Mol, along with the quality of each, gave £31/6 that unique flavour of the older Bems (like no. 15 or 16 for example). Quite delicious.

Steve McGregor made my day. Byrne prides himself on his "subtle" approach to comics and recently put down George Perez in The Comics Journal for his lack of such. Glad to see someone else disagrees.

There he is again, Wayne Massop. More, lots more--while you're at it, let's have more of Mark Farmer too.

Aha, the letters page. Nope, I wasn't accusing Barry Winetrobe (or anyone else, for that matter) of anything. True, he hasn't written me a cheery little note--but then, I've never sent him any money for Vertigo, so how could he? The one thing I was thinking about was when I received a copy of New Aeon through the post. I couldn't remember sending off for it, and there was no note to indicate if I had, or if it was a freebie meant to drum up a response. Whoever sent it must think me rude for not responding--unfortunately, New Aeon got mixed up with some old newspapers, and was given to the scouts. Sorry.

Ian Abrahams is angry with me, and his anger is partly justified--"doodles" does sound disrespectful and insulting, it was meant as just another way of saying "drawing", "picture", or "artwork", an attempt to provide a bit of variety. However, his distress at my bucking the system is well placed. To hell with "tradition", if it means people write or draw solely for the reward of a free issue; that's not friendship, that's greed. If someone prints something I've done, that's all the reward I want. If they give me that issue free, I'm grateful (very grateful), but I won't bitch if they don't. All I ask is that I'm told that my doodle appears in the latest issue, so I can buy it if I don't subscribe -- my ego needs boosting, just like anyone else. Stuff tradition, if it's going to kill the friendliness Ian and I both enjoy. /(Well said--not that a freebie for a letter <u>not</u> published has ever been a tradition in comics fandom, at least not that I've come across. It would get too expensive, and put us all out of business! SF fandom may be different, of course...)/

Oh yes, perhaps flashy and intricate art can distract the reader, but it rarely detracts from the story. It slows you down, makes you savour the words and the pictures, and makes the comic a longer read...and so better value for money, no?

Dick Domar

A great idea, doing a combined Bem & Mol. And I'm pleased to hear that we can now expect one or the other more regularly. The letters were interesting, and some comments were made which I'd like to give my opinion about.

Firstly: Sprite. I'm in full agreement about her being rubbish. There is no sense in having a wimpy kid around whose presence can only lead to statutory rape in the future. It's obvious isn't it that she will soon develop sexually, and possibly have a crush for a male member of the team. Losing the artistic talents of John Byrne is bad enough, but introducing a little girl has all the makings of the ruination of the book. Get rid of her now before it's too late. /(Who, me?)/

Secondly: Poor Ian Abrahams hasn't got a clue. He begins by advocating that a person who contributes to a fanzine should receive a complimentary issue. What nonsense. My own fanzine THE OWL'S EFFORT relies solely on contributions from its subscribers, and by the nature of it being a letterzine it needs letters to fill its pages. Therefore if I was to send all my correspondents a complimentary issue, I would then have no subscribers, and all the costs of printing it would come out of my own pocket and I would get no return at all. In order for me to actually break even I would need over 150 paid subs, but I don't even have a third of that number at the moment. (Hopefully this may change when people learn that I'm back to dealing --albeit on an irregular -- but I'm only dealing in order to make the zine pay for itself.) In the past I have sent out a lot of complimentary copies to people, but this has now changed and only a small number of issues will be free, and these will be for review columns in other fanzines. Although why I should even bother I really don't know, as hardly any review of TOE has ever brought much response.

Thirdly: Ian again. If he honestly believes that the prices of X-MEN are high because of the fan club, then he obviously knows nothing of the country-wide popularity of the comic. Not everyone who buys and reads it is a member, in fact most kids probably know nothing of the club. People buy the title because they like it, and there is a genuine big demand for it. As new comic fans enter fandom, or the realms of comic collecting, they soon learn that there are some comics worth collecting and reading--so it's no wonder that they desire back issues of the X-Men. Add to this the American demand for the comic, and you get ludicrous high prices on the ND issues. And because they are Non Distributed in this country, British dealers who import them are paying a high price -- and this high price is passed on to the fans. /(It's not just ND issues that are expensive; pence copies from 3 years ago are topping a pound each now, and still selling quickly. When you're hot, you're hot!)/

Graeme Bassett

Sorry I didn't write last issue, only I have been rather busy, with putting the finishing touches to the script for "Sappho And The Sex Werewolves", a new Italian production which is potentially the most accurate, and controversial, treatment of this classic supernatural theme, and well worth looking out for in 1982.

I suppose that the "Nationwide" incident is common knowledge now, but in case you didn't see it I'll just give you a re-cap. Basically, during the "Watchdog" section of television's most technically accomplished news magazine, an announcer by the name of Hugh Scully brought out a photo of a Mrs Penge of Gloucester, who just popped into a bookshop... "She wanted to buy some comics for her 7-year-old son", said Mr Scully with the winning smile he is famous for. "She bought STAR TREK, STAR

WARS, and THE ALIEN." Scully didn't see fit to mention that these three albums would have cost her about five quid...a little steep for a 7-year-old perhaps... but then it might have suggested to the viewers that here was a woman with more money than sense, rather than an outraged consumer. Anyway, little Jason sat down to read Alien. And, horror of horrors, he found some dirty words. Nationwide then showed a number of shots from the Goodwin & Simonson album in which they managed to maintain this programme's notoriously condescending attitude towards comics, while at the same time expressing frothy-mouthed outrage. I won't go into the methods, but if I say that Glyn Worsnip of "That's Life" and The Daily Star was involved, you'll probably be able to figure them out. For a moment I thought we were going to be treated to a repetition of the ACTION business, with Mr Scully ripping up the album on-screen... but no. Although the Alien album had visibly been pawed by grubby little fingers (presumably to make sure they hadn't missed a single corrupting influence), Nationwide decided to keep a sense of proportion, and asked Futura for a reply. "Well," said old Skull the Slayer, "According to Futura there's nothing wrong with this..." Did I detect a slight smile as he continued, "They feel that this is science fiction, and their main audience is an adult one." No, that can't have been a smile, because now he was back to his usual Joe Friday, "Book 'em Danno" glare, "Well, we here at Watchdog feel there's a simple solution to all this". Actually, their solution was quite reasonable: a dirty great "For adults only" sticker on the cover.

There are only two drawbacks to this. One: there had been an extensive ad campaign for Alien, which showed that the content was X certificate. Two: before Dez Skinn took over the editorship, MONSTER MAG had used just such a sticker to sell more copies. /(It's strange how often, when they cover a subject one actually knows something about, the media can be

caught out--it makes one wonder about the reliability of the other 99% of their output! But I expect Mrs Penge has learnt her lesson, and is buying text-type books for her kid now; why, she's probably even now reading him a chapter of "Carrie" to send him off to sleep...)/

Anyway, back to good old Bem. In your double lettercol, old Dave Harwood was demonstrating why he's better suited as an IPC artist rather than a Justice of the Peace, when he wondered why Kev Langley and Ivo Steyn were so goshdarned concerned that these two girls should be converted to comics fandom. Obviously, they were trying to initiate a meaningful relationship /(actually, that's <u>not</u> how Graeme phrased it -- but we don't want that nice Mr Scully after Bem, do we!)/, and pretty desperate they were too if they'd been forced to revert to the old "showing them the illustrated magazine" ploy.

By the way, if you've still room for criticism of the Marvelcon, I wish someone had pointed out the games, crèche, and other provisions Marvel made for the younger kids. I know they're supposed to be commercial bastards and all that, but how many cons organized by caring, sympatico comics fans ever bothered to make provisions for the little kids who are bound to be drawn to these events expecting more than a bunch of weeds in glasses and beards gabbing like mad and throwing ridiculous sums of money about.

But, enough cynicism. I'm in agreement with what Howard Leroy Davis says about <u>critiquing</u> comics rather than reviewing them. This has a vast advantage over the popular "Tale-Enders", to wit: you don't have to buy those expensive advance imports. In fact, you don't even have to re....sorry, critique <u>new</u> comics. The first CONAN I ever bought off the counter was the penultimate Baz Smiff (or Barry Saxe-Coburg Smith, as he's now known) issue, "The Wings of the Vulture". A smasher, that was. Even after a zillion readings there are still new surprises when I pick that issue up; another subtle twist of the plot I failed to catch before, a new background detail in the art, and, surprisingly in hindsight, another piece of subtle humour working against the hero. That issue, and the succeeding "Living Tarim" issues, were probably the best examples of Conan-esque action to be published by Marvel. That's an excessive claim, but I'm in an excessive mood. I do feel that Marvel and DC scripters should be shown those particular issues whenever they contemplate undertaking a new epic. Although the Tarim story spreads over quite a few issues, I think each particular instalment of the epic manages to sustain the illusion of being a self-contained story, while building up the momentum of the siege which forms the background of the story.

I've filled in your awards sheet, even though I can't help the feeling that awards are a little bit daft. Nevertheless, I propose that you should get a special award for your stalwart service during the Marvelcon...something along the lines of "Looney Handler of the Year" ...Did those cardboard cut-outs actually survive the weekend, I wonder? /(Yes, readers, I did indeed meet Graeme at the Marvelcon; though it took me a while to realize that this tall, quiet, reserved person helping at the fanzine table was really the notorious Mister B!)/

Nick Almond

Firstly, congratulations on another consistently good issue of Bem. Your Eagle Award was well earned. However, what prompted me to write was Ian Abrahams' letter in Reaction, referring to the X-Men Fan Club.

Three years ago I sat in bed on a Saturday morning, and saw a small mention in Comic Media News International (R.I.P.) for X-ams, basically a trivia quiz and essay competition which Geoff Lamprey was organizing. From that early start, the current X-Men Fan Club grew; the small number of us who took part in (and, in my case, won) the X-ams chipped in some money, articles and art, and Geoff put in an incredible number of hours to get the whole show off the ground.

It has been an incredible success. The membership has now topped 200, and about 400 other copies are sold. I am amazed that the small beginnings have tapped in to such a large number of fans who want to read about the characters and actually enjoy them, rather than read about the whole range of fandom and the comics industries.

The main question I have in my mind is why, as fans of comics, we do not see more such Fan Clubs. I would have responded just as eagerly to a trivia quiz and exam about the Avengers, or Doc Strange, or any of half a dozen other titles. Why has noone else in the last three years had the time and energy to organize a Conan Fan Club, or whatever? /(People with the vision, persistence, and energy of a Geoff Lamprey are rare; if there are others in comics fandom, they have not chosen to devote so much of their time to the study of one single group of superheroes.)/

Geoff was very fortunate in his choice of title, because Cockrum/Byrne and Chris Claremont have provided continuously acceptable art and stories. However, at the time the Club started, we were in the first year or two of the life of the new X-Men. Cockrum could have been replaced by Heck, and Claremont by Macchio. We in the Club who were in at the beginning very much remember the first-series X-Men, and were their fans. I think the subsequent success of the new X-Men is far less due to the Club than to the unusual longevity of its creative team, and their abilities.

My invitation to those who think that another title is better than the X-Men is that they go out and find a few dozen like-minded people, and get organizing. It can only be good for fandom if we have more enthusiasm and enjoyment flowing, rather than the sometimes depressing criticism and moaning that seems so common.

Come on out--admit you really do enjoy something. It'll do you good.

Kevin Trundley

The idea of a combination ish between two fanzines seems to have worked quite well, as an unexpected one-off, like Chris Ash's Captain Frog spectacular back in Bem-20. I liked the glossy cover, by the way--you see, some of us do notice these little things.

But... where's Thundermole this issue? Surely you could have squeezed in the Mole of Steel, mmmm? Or maybe...gasp! Maybe Terry Moore's suddenly decided to stop drawing the strip, while in the middle of a storyline, leaving us all in suspendere. Oh no! /(Keep fingers crossed and eyes open, Kevin; I suspect we've had postal problems, but when we get new instalments in, they'll see print right away.)/

As for the news... So John Byrne leaves not only the X-Men, but Captain America as well, eh? So much for the wow! creative team of Roger Stern -- John Byrne -- Joe Rubinstein, dedicated to bringing innovation and consistency to the living legend --though it was good while it lasted.

After Byrne's X-odus from the X-Men, and I don't think anyone will be glad to see him go, Dave Cockrum will be the ideal replacement. Those early issues of the new X-Men, such as the fight with the Sentinels, and Black Tom & The Juggernaut in Ireland, were really enjoyable. The book had a real pace in those days, union in story and art, a pace which seemed to come to a sudden, impassable dead end with the death of Phoenix. Nice to hear of the What If issue, discussing "What If Phoenix Had Lived?" (What If Jim Shooter hadn't have been editor?) Marvel know nothing if not how to milk the support of its readers.

But what of the repercussions in fandom after John Byrne leaves the X-Men? It's sad but true that the average comic reader (and that includes fans, kids) pays more attention to a comic's art than its story, when ideally the two elements should be so compatible as to be interdependent.

As an exception, look at Steve Gerber's Man-Thing stories, such as "Song-Cry of the Living Dead Man", or "A Candle For Sainte-Cloud". They still ring (in my mind anyway) as classics, even though the comic at that time was going through a bit of a rough patch artistically, having no permanent artist. Even lacking artistic consistency, the strength of the writing was such as to make those issues still memorable. Unfortunately, the first series of Man-Thing folded shortly afterwards.

But going back to the X-Men: Claremont & Byrne & Austin work really well as a team. They can put out nice comics, but of this team, who is the strongest (in the sense of "having the greatest appeal to fandom) link? When Byrne leaves, will the X-Men keep hitting it up there in the Eagle Awards? Will Cerebro, the fannish extension (?) of the X-Men still have enough support and enthusiasm to keep it going, or will fan support divert to the upcoming John Byrne-orientated new look on the Fantastic Four -- or maybe to the Spectacular Spider-Man, drawn in collaboration with Roger Stern's script?

So, for the X-Men, which is the stronger --the comic and its characters, the team that produces those characters, or one of the members of that team? /(They're all important, I'd say. Looking at The Comic Reader's American comics shops "TCR Top 100" over the last 12 months, X-Men has always been in the top 2, with its sales rising steadily. Early in the year, it was beaten into second place by Spider-Man #200; more recently, even Avengers #200 couldn't do the trick, and in the last 6 months only Moon Knight #1 could top it. The departure of John Byrne may hurt sales of X-Men, and certainly will help the FF and Spectacular Spider-Man, but it's not likely to stop it being the fan's favourite comic--especially with the changes on The Avengers of late! Of course, there's the New Teen Titans, likely to be DC's top fan seller, coming along, too...)/

Another bit of worrying speculation is the proposed "Death of Captain Marvel" extravaganza by Jim Starlin. Now, I'm

particularly fond of Starlin's work; the Captain Marvel/Thanos and Warlock/Magus storylines will be talked about for a long while yet (though I've not been so struck on his "Metamorphosis Odyssey" work in Epic (--right lads, get him--), it seems to be moving overly slowly for me, or maybe it's just that my initial enthusiasm gets a bit worn down after having to wait a couple of months for the next issue). So if Starlin is coming out with a new full-length storyline, you can bet it'll at least be something to look forward to --but killing off Captain Marvel seems to be going a bit too far.

Okay, CM was never Marvel's most popular character, as far as sales go -- you only have to look at how many times the title has been resurrected to realise that. But I reckoned there was still a helluva lot of untapped potential in the character: good stuff is still coming out. Forgetting the Starlin issues of CM, what about the storylines like the Al Milgrom issues of the Lunar Legion and the Trial of the Watcher, or the Doug Moench-Pat Broderick-Bruce Patterson issues of Thanos' schemes on Titan. Then there are CM's appearances in Marvel Spotlight after his own title folded, with the Ditko issue a bit of an embarrassing exception -- it was all good stuff, especially Spotlight #8 with its Mike W. Barr-Frank Miller-Bruce Patterson collaboration. A damned good story, even if the second half seemed so rushed.

Still, it's sales that keep a title alive, not a damned good story. But is CM, who I thought such a well-established character in the Marvel Universe, so disposable? Apparently. (Though I'm sure the story will be nigh-on unforgettable.)

So what if John Byrne or Neal Adams wanted to do a story in a similar format; I wonder what other Marvel characters would be similarly disposable. Maybe we'd see the "death" of the Sub-Mariner, the Silver Surfer, Killraven, Werewolf by Night, or Morbius -- all secondary though popular characters in the Marvel Universe.

Of course, death in the comics is rarely permanent; heroes and villains are sent to and from death with relative ease. Look at Wonder Man's return in The Avengers, or the revival of Balder in Thor. However, when Jim Starlin "killed" Warlock, it seemed as final as the real thing; Captain Marvel's proposed death will probably be equally irreversible.

I'm just a bit narked, as well as surprised, I guess, that Marvel has agreed to get rid of one of their characters when he seemed to have such potential.

Lilian Edwards — In the words of the song, say it ain't so. You <u>did</u> fake my copy of the Eagle Awards results --didn't you? You don't expect me to believe that fandom hasn't moved its collective ass in twelve months? Sorry about the phraseology, but having exhausted all logical argument (in Bem #29), all that's left to do is swear. I will therefore drop the subject, merely adding that this massive and conscious rejecting of thoughtful and volitional judgement by fandom at large leads me almost to hold the same opinion about it that I do about the American public since the election of Ronald Reagan -- though not quite.

The joint issue idea was a nice thought but I'm afraid it didn't really work. What we ended up with was decidedly an issue of Bem, so much so that MoI fans may justly feel they've lost an issue--while the MoI elements also disturbed the familiar tone of Bem for <u>its</u> supporters--notably 'Oink' clashed with the established literacy of Bem's articles and, trivial though it may seem, the difference in typeface also disturbed the usual professional production. I must however say that the MoI-supplied strip was much the best serious strip I've seen in Bem--dare I ask Mike if it's autobiographical? (No, scratch that last; having just re-read it it's a really nasty question.)

In the letters page... What can you say about Michael O'Donoghue's letter? Arguing with the deliberately blind is like trying to hold a sensible conversation with a Jehovah's Witness. One <u>could</u> go through his list of imagined defects in competing comics to the X-Men (<u>what</u> art deficiencies has Iron Man suffered, except for the inevitable fill-ins? Bob Layton has kept the art consistent on the book, a remarkable job over two years and 3 different pencillers; <u>where</u> does Daredevil fall down on scripting? This is the NME style of criticism--make a witty derogatory remark with no justification and pass on as quickly as possible before the proles catch you at it), but it's so much e. to tear holes in the X-Men instead. ., issues of high quality art and imaginative stories? What about the disastrous Jean-and-Scott-thinking-each-other-dead story line, which even Claremont now admits was both totally ill-conceived and carried on far too long? What about the moronic Arcade stories? The art is admittedly less easy to criticise, but it has visibly declined of late, and in #141 there is not a single striking layout or nicely-drawn panel. What confuses people about the X-Men is their vast compulsiveness, which is usually equated in comics with quality -- in fact with the X-Men it's really their soap-opera dangling plotlines which make you read it first out of the monthly stack, <u>not</u> any special magic. Venerating a comic for this is like praising Crossroads.

I feel I must comment on the sf/comics fandom thing currently being aired in Reaction, because I myself am currently fairly heavily involved in sf fandom of a type in that I'm on the committee of a convention (Faircon this July, plug plug!) --I say "of a type", because I'm fairly sure that when sensible people like Mike Cruden & Dave Harwood refer to intolerant and immature sf fans, they're referring to some very small factions of fannish fans or "faans" who are really involved in a very constricted social club which happens to pass under the general banner of "SF fandom" -- to which in general it actually bears no resemblance. The factionalisation of sf fandom is something very foreign to comics fans, who seem to me to be a much smaller and hence more intimate and less bitchy group. It is really unfair to tar all sf fans with the same brush on account of a couple of crazy loons. I also think the dichotomy between comics and sf fans is vastly exaggerated--we've already mentioned that most comics fans seem to read hundreds of sf books, but more surprisingly, quite a number of active sf fans I have met also collect comics. They simply tend not to be active in both fandoms, with notable exceptions like Steven J. Green of course. If only the two groups could call a truce long enough, they could be of great value to each other. SF could teach comics how to hold conventions, and comics could tell sf a lot about producing fanzines and decent artwork. Yorcon II this Easter is apparently going to take comic art as its partial theme, so why don't fans descend on it in droves?

Finally, I'd just like to agree with David Gryc that more actual discussion of comics in Bem is needed -- the return of Reg Uspatoff's column of news comment is long overdue, particularly when 4-colour comics have just gone through their biggest format change in years. Extended reviews along the lines of TCJ's overviews could be interesting too.

PS: Could you mention in Fan-Things that the art show of Faircon would welcome artwork from anyone in the country who feels he has something to display--contact me at my address. At Hitchercon last year, we displayed some artwork from the Ogre folks which was a great success and made a change from the somewhat standard sf illos. /(Would you settle for a mention in Reaction? Lilian enclosed a Faircon Progress Report, which reveals that, in the special dramatic presentation "The Committee Strikes Back", she is booked to play Chewlacquer the Nookie...)/

Maureen James — Many thanks for Bem/MoI --the first of many team-ups maybe? I don't think Bem has teamed up with any other zine before--unless you can count Weird Trash, and of course there is The Heroine Showcase's two issues. Anyway, I do like this idea a lot; how about having a once a year team-up issue?

I notice David Gryc (Hi there, David) mentions the lack of comics talk in Bem, and there is, now I come to think of it. Mind you, it could be because people start off by talking about comics and then it progresses to views on artists/writers, to artists in general, and so on. One thing I <u>have</u> noticed of late though in comics is that there's an overkill on sorcerors--in a couple of issues of Teen Titans it seemed like they were crawling out of the woodwork every place you looked. Now, I <u>like</u> Teen Titans, but you can have too much of a good thing... I've also noticed that Clea is having another of her "am I worthy" spasms, I <u>do</u> wish she'd make up her mind; she's becoming irritating and I have visions of "will or won't Clea leave" being dragged out for ages.

How nice to see an "Elfquest" history--any of you out there who don't buy it: you should!

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Dez Skinn — Thanks for continuing to send me copies of your ever-improving Bem. While most of the other leaders have dropped by the wayside for varying reasons, it's good to see you continue. Not that I envy you--as well as the workload, you've a responsibility to fans and professionals alike to keep us all in the picture. With no CMNI, CU, F/A or Pan, you've inherited command.

As well as hoping this letter may encourage you to continue sending me comp copies, I'm breaking my usual silence in the fan medium for a two-fold reason.

Both are connected. The first reason is that I'm getting more & more disappointed with the increasingly petty attitudes of comicbook professionals on both sides of the Atlantic. Maybe it's the natural end product of in-depth interviews, but the near-libellous (or often highly libellous) comments many supposedly professional people make can do no good to the industry whatsoever.

As a kid, I had a great respect for comicbook creators. Now, the kids must see them in a totally different light...always complaining about pay, colleagues, conditions, and continually stabbing creators in the back.

My approach has always been (perhaps through naivety) never to criticise current colleagues, competitors or employers publicly; not even ex-colleagues, competitors, or employers. The world just isn't big enough — and you never know who you may end up working with in the future. Besides, what this whole thing is about is the product. Over the last two years, I've been the target of lots of criticism. Fine. It happens. One has to be able to take it. In fact, it can be quite flattering that people are affected by you or your product sufficiently to make them comment.

Each of us has different views, different insights, but they're purely personal, and unless relevant are so much hot air.

I left newspapers for comics in 1969 because I wanted to be involved with them. When I felt I'd learnt my craft, I wanted to improve them. I may not have set the world alight, using different companies' funds to try to make the market more respectable (and hopefully more profitable, so that I could continue), but I've tried...and I'm still trying.

I believe in the medium, that's why I'm still working in it. I enjoy it. In the past, if I've felt things have turned stale or the future's looked bleak and beyond my direct ability to change, I've moved.

Both MAD and Marvel were great for conversation at dinner parties, but creatively zilch. Reprints are always cheaper, and they're not too satisfying.

Which leads me nicely to my second reason for writing. By applying the comic book technique to industry outside of the traditional publishers, I believe that breakthroughs can be made. On the inside, I doubt it.

THE MONSTER CLUB was a great challenge, one that we're all proud of. But, being meant for the Cannes festival only, hardly anyone saw it. With the latest magazine I've been involved in, I'll reach more people than with all the issues of House of Hammer (or Starburst) put together!

The people behind it are Scalextric. With their money and their faith, Ian Kennedy, Steve Parkhouse and I have produced a magazine that I'm quite honestly more proud of than anything I've ever been associated with.

I would recommend all bitter professionals in the comic book world to do what I attempt -- put your energies into your product. That's what people are interested in, and that's what will keep us all in work.

John Green — I don't think it's fair the way some people like Steven J. Green, Simon Russell, Chris Ash, Ivo Steyn, Ian Abrahams, and even one of your own writers, Kathleen Glancy, nearly always get their letters published.

Lilian Edwards even had two letters in the same issue (Bem-30); is this because you have hardly any readers, or are you biassed for a few readers? Apart from this, your zine is great.

/(It's a pity we can't use every letter of comment Bem gets; roughly one-third to half the letters received early enough get used. These aren't chosen at random; I try to choose the most interesting ones --the letters that will make Reaction as good a read as possible. And the people you mention are pretty good at writing letters -- they certainly ought to be by now, most of them get enough practise!)/

John Porter — In regard to Ivo Steyn's letter in Bem 31, or more accurately your comment at the end of it, of course it matters that the world is full of people who don't like comics. It's an incredible concept, when you stop to think about it. There are literally millions of people walking around with a massive void in their lives. People who have never experienced the agony of hiking around dozens of newsagents before finally admitting that the new comics really won't be out for another day or so yet. People who have never walked into a sleazy second-hand bookshop to feel the surge of adrenalin when they spot the pile of old comics nestling between the girlie magazines and old copies of 'The Ring' and 'True Detective'. For Christ's sake, there are even people who have never seen a comic by Claremont and Byrne. Or Adams, Kirby, Englehart, Rogers, Gerber, Infantino, Thomas...

What comic fan has never really wanted to convert his 'mundane' (God, I hate that word) friends to the bittersweet joys of collecting? Comics become such a passion that it's difficult to understand how anyone survives without them. Presumably they go through life aware that there's something missing, but they never find out what it is. It's a sad world really.

I see Kathleen Glancy is still trying to analyse the heroes. Bad move Kath, as I'm sure you've been told before. Like it or not, with a few exceptions, comics (yes, even X-Men) are not written for the fans, but for what Stan Lee called "the bubblegum brigade". The kids like men with metal claws ripping up robots & dinosaurs, and so that's what they get. And as for Kitty Pryde, surely she's a step in the right direction. Xavier's supposed to be running a school, after all. Perhaps Franklin Richards and that kid from FF 203 ought to be enrolled as well.

Do I deduce from certain veiled comments here and there that other people have noticed that DC actually publish better books than Marvel? Sure Marvel have one or two excellent titles, but DC over the last couple of years have offered us consistent quality for our 15p (three bob! Christ, remember when they were 9d?). A mediocre Marvel is no surprise, but one feels really cheated by a less-than-good DC comic.

I also notice less talk on Dredd and 2000AD in the letters. Perhaps I missed something (almost certainly, in fact), but did nobody object to him sending Judge Lopez to his death. Surely Ms Glancy and her fellow Freudians could have a field day over that.

In closing, I'd like to ask my fellow fans whether or not they feel fandom is too insular. Certainly to those of us who are only occasional adventurers into the esoteric world of British Comic Fandom, there is an impression that there is an inner circle of fans who control it and somehow object to 'outsiders' muscling in. Over to you, Lock, Taylor, James, Glancy and Co. Am I paranoid, or should I subscribe? /(Oh, you should subscribe, dear reader; once you're in, you're in! It may seem like a closed shop from outside--but if you want to join in, nobody will try to stop you.)/

Max O'Connor — I must say, I'd been getting worried about Bem--it had been losing its old magic for some time, but then came... Bem #31/MoI #6! This was certainly an excellent read--and 44 pages!

Pretentious, pretentious, PRETENTIOUS; I'm sick of the bloody word. Anyone that tries to write something a little different or more adult is immediately labelled "pretentious". Perhaps McGregor is pretentious, but at least what he produces is interesting, and thought provoking. It seems to be the favourite pastime in fandom these days, to madly attack writers, artists, comics and fanzines just because the person concerned can't think of anything pleasant to say. It's always been easy to destroy unthinkingly--now it is passé to praise.

Before you attack me, I want to make it known that in my mind McGregor is not the perfect writer--far from it. His characters use totally unrealistic dialogue for one thing, but I still prefer him to Lee, Mantlo, Fleisher, Isabella, Burkett, De Falco, Bates and many more. Two of the very best have got to be Michelinie and Moench, who combine excellent characterisation with superior plotting ability, defying the restrictive format of the 50 cent wads of coloured paper.

Oh, nice cover, Colin.

Paul Strout — Thanx for Bem/MoI 31/6, definitely the most readable issue for quite a while. The "Robo-Hunter" article was a well thought out piece which filled me in on Sam Slade's previous adventures (I remember reading the "Verdus" story at the time, but I've somehow managed to lose all my early issues of 2000 AD--the very thought is enough to make me cry into my synthi-caff), and provided a few good laughs.

The "Project Pegasus" piece was OK, but didn't actually say anything of any importance. Personally, I would have liked to see some speculations on the whys and wherefores of the "Roxxon" connection; this plot's been hanging around so long it's become a standard device to conclude a story, with this bearded guy standing in front of a partly obscured "Roxxon" sign and saying coolly that "It's a minor setback", and they'll soon have the world in their hands anyway.

So they're putting Miller on Dr Strange? /(Not any more; if you blinked, you missed him! Marshall Rogers is the name given in the latest news...)/

The return of "Kamikaze Man"??????????

I'm saying nothing about this year's Eagles, apart from the fact that, to me, the whole idea of awards of any kind is a pointless one. Ah, but the highlight of the issue was the ad on page 30 for the Leeds mart; who said heaven and earth don't mix?

Geoff Lamprey

Thank you very much, Martin, for the kind comments made on my behalf in reply to Ian Abrahams' letter. But, lest anyone thinks that it is now open season on diabetic mutants, perhaps it would be wise of me to clarify the picture.

The X-Men were popular long before the Club, let alone the Eagle Awards, came along. The Club's formation was largely due to my desire to communicate with other people with a similar interest. The fact that the X-Men have stayed at the attention of fans is largely due to the creative team on the comic, not the Club. The Club's attention has always been swayed heavily to the concept of the Marvel Universe, rather than the creative side as a whole. The reason I started an X-Men Fan Club, as opposed to an Iron Man Fan Club or a MoKF Fan Club is because I can sympathize more with the former as misfits in society than with multi-millionaire industrialists or with espionage skullduggery; I would like to point out though that I do read these titles among the many comics that I also read, but have always regarded The X-Men as something very very close to my heart. So do a lot of other people.

In 1979 I decided that the Club would not get itself involved in the Eagle Awards for the very reason that Ian gave, simply because of this type of reaction that the Club could produce. This year, largely due to the presence of members who only pick up CEREBRO on a regular basis, I felt otherwise. I would be doing a disservice to members if the Club were to noly print the results of the Eagle Awards without having actually participated in them in the first place. Therefore forms that we received were distributed. That was as far as my service to Club members went. I clearly stated in the X-Etorials in Cerebro that they were to be sent directly to the Counting Centre, NOT to me; those I received were passed on right away. On the odd occasion that I was asked how I would be voting, I declined to comment, since I also believe that what one person favours, another will dislike. /(Every fanzine is allowed to distribute Eagle forms -- encouraged, even. Not to do so would be a terrible disadvantage in the "favourite fanzine" category. And, since the actual forms say they should be returned when completed to whoever provided the voter with his copy, you should save your members vast sums in postage by letting them send their forms back to you. The only pitfall to avoid, as far as I can see, is any attempt in a fanzine to try and organize the voters by suggesting which single or continued story, cover or fanzine they should vote for -- which is one reason I've not acted on the occasional suggestion that Bem do any review of potential Eagle candidates for the year.)/

With regard to X-Men comic prices, the Club has successfully kept its own prices down. While our stocks lasted, X-MEN #121 and #122 were kept at 20p (plus p & p) per copy, for example. The respective prices of all our stock do not change, despite dealers thinking that they are worth more. Seeing the prices that dealers offer X-Men at makes me shudder, so the Club makes a stand on low prices. The prices that the X-Men comic get are based, on the whole, on the sale price in America, and by the fans who are likely to pay anything to own them. The Club also avoids buying these back issues at these prices, lest the fandom community get to believe that the Club agrees with them. I'm not saying that the effect would be monumental, but I don't believe that dealers would ignore the fact either. /(Comics that go up in value 1500% in four years are the sort of things dealers dream about--and also try to create, I fear. MARVEL TEAM-UP #53 is advertised in the "Mile High" double-page ad in the March Marvels at £15 not because Hulk is guest-star, but because it's the first comic in which John Byrne rendered the X-Men, who make a brief appearance to drop Spider-Man off in this book after MARVEL TEAM-UP ANNUAL #1. So, let us try to resist this fashion--the first person to pay a fiver for Marvel Team-Up #53 is a sissy? There will now be a short pause while we all check our check-lists...)/

On the subject of "editor & publisher" --within the realms of fandom they are essentially one and the same. The responsibility for the preparation, distribution & selling of each issue of CEREBRO is mine. It also gives a name for someone to write to, instead of hiding behind a collective name which is likely to confuse people into believing there is no single head of the Club.

As to the question of releasing the X-Index with Cerebro, the original question clearly asked whether it should be sold separately--the vote said no. In Cerebro #7, I had great difficulty in stapling both Cerebro and the Index together, due to the number of pages, and many members complained about it. A decision had to be made between issues of Cerebro, and I thought it was a wise decision to staple the two separately, inserting the Index as a supplement in accordance with the reply to that survey question. Decisions in publishing tend towards the cheapest way out. The current market price of an industrial stapler is £24.50--money better spent in keeping the Club running. While in London after this year's convention, I was able to purchase an excellent second-hand one for £7, so Cerebro and the Index will again be stapled together.

As to news & reviews, where nothing was specific I had the casting vote. Fanzines such as Bem already provide comics related news; but where such information affected the X-Men comic it would be announced, because that was within the confines of the Club. As to reviewing fanzines, all the members who write regularly to me applauded my decision, for in fan-to-fan communication we shouldn't just limit our interests in fandom to just the Club.

Although I receive most of my mail from Club members (for those interested in statistics I topped eleven hundred letters in 1980), I do receive letters from some non-members as well, and I do reply to them all (mainly at my own expense when I don't receive SAEs). Anyone can write to me, that's not a limitation. Cerebro, however, is a clubzine where only members can contribute. It's not so much a ban, more a way to ensure that the 'zine is the domain of Club members, and is not swamped by people who don't subscribe. For UK comic fandom in this respect it is probably unique -- for a Club it is not. This limitation certainly hasn't stopped the majority of the 213 members (at time of writing) in doing something towards the Club. The members feel involved with the Club, which is why we're succeeding and still going strong.

Kathleen Glancy

Still playing the covers game, I am sure that in the KA-ZAR #1 cover repro, Shanna the She-Devil is thinking "One quick stab, and the tiger and the comic are mine." While Spider-Man is saying "Please, they only allow this sort of behaviour in The Hulk, and anyway I'm not that sort of superhero." /(And Sprite is saying "Now where's this surprise you promised me,

Kathleen?")/

Ian Abrahams' letter more or less makes it necessary that I make a statement--since I too have quit the X-Men Fan Club, and if I don't explain why, it may be assumed my reasons are the same as his. Not so. I see no reason why there should not be an X-Men Fan Club, if people want one. Nor is there any reason why its members shouldn't vote in the Eagle Awards --they only have one vote apiece, like everyone else, and I doubt if they alone can sway the results -- surely, if they could, Cerebro and not Bem would have won the fanzine award. Nor have I any objection to the way the Club is run -- Ian's statistics are a bit picky when you consider that if his reasoning was applied to the country at large, no government formed since the introduction of General Elections would have got in, since in every case the number of the people who voted for something else or did not bother to vote at all was greater than that which voted for a particular party. Geoff may have simply, and probably rightly, assumed that if a substantial minority of members voted for a particular course of action it was probable that those who did not vote were not necessarily violently against that action, but, rather, simply indifferent--and proceeded to act as the

wishes of the said substantial minority, the probable indifference of the majority of the remainder, his own convenience, and economic necessity all dictated.

My reason for leaving the Club is much simpler. Recent plot developments in The X-Men, and the prominence given to certain characters, have put me right off the book. I think it's on the skids, and unless a drastic improvement is made soon it's going to go downhill fast. And I do not expect such an improvement from either Claremont or Shooter. As you can see, I can really no longer be called a _fan_ of the X-Men. Therefore, it would be pretty silly to remain in their fan club, no?

I have an opinion on the Wolverine's new costume. In fact, I happen to know its origin story. One day, far in the future, the Legion of Superheroes decided to do some historical research, and sent a team back to the past. Due to a hiccup in the Cosmic All, they accidentally landed on Marvel-Earth. While they were there figuring out a way back, Timber Wolf decided to wash his spare costume. He had not realized that, tough as 30th Century fabrics are, they are no match for a 20th Century launderette. The colours of the costume ran a bit, forming a new pattern, and it shrank. Boy, how it shrank--especially the sleeves. Disgusted, the Wolf threw it in the dustbin.

Now, it is a little-known fact that the animal known as the Wolverine, or Glutton, has such an appetite that it will scavenge for food as well as kill. Its human avatar has similar traits, and it so happened he was looking through that very dustbin for fag ends when...

I'm not so sure how he got the headpiece, though. Ideas, anyone?

The conspiracy against women persists. Even those who are let to live are being treated pretty badly. Look at the Black Canary--first they subject her to sexist insults in Brave & Bold, then in DC Comics Presents #30 she is shown as witless. I refer to her statement that now she _knows_ that Larry Lance is watching over her, somewhere. Since it has just been proved that his supposed appearances were a projection of her subconscious, this is totally illogical -- she might _hope_ his soul went on, but all she _knows_ is that a rational explanation for her visions of him has removed any solid evidence that he does. Even as a hope, I should have thought that the idea that he was watching her all the time, presumably including what she and Green Arrow do off-panel, would be disconcerting to say the least. Just because the poor girl uses 'Canary' as a fighting name, they shouldn't imply that she is bird-witted.

Rob Hansen

This whole SF fandom vs. comics fandom thing in your letters pages seems a little strange to me, particularly because the majority of SF fans don't seem to even know that comics fandom exists, and even when told aren't particularly interested in hearing anything about it. Perhaps knowledge of this indifference causes some of the vehemence? There are SF fans other than myself who read and collect comics, but not many.

Incidentally, to answer Ivo Steyn, who says "...so far _every_ comics fan I've spoken to or corresponded with had read a fairly huge number of sf books, certainly enough to qualify him/her as an sf fan." --Within SF fandom, an SF fan is someone involved in SF fandom (ie in fandom or cons); all the others are SF _readers_, and the quantity of SF they read doesn't alter that one iota. It's a distinction I had assumed comics fans also made, but apparently I was wrong. Also Steyn's experience that all the SF fans he had spoken to "nearly started throttling me when I didn't agree with their glorious evaluation...of a particular book/writer" does not gel with any SF fan I've ever encountered in fifteen conventions, five years of involvement with fandom, and innumerable "One Tun's". I can only assume Dutch fandom to be markedly different from its UK counterpart. /(Dashed excitable, these foreign chappies. But the question of where one draws the line between fan and reader--or how many fans can dance on the head of one reader?--is one too delicate for mere mortals to wrestle with.)/

One difference in tone between SF and comics fandom I detect is a certain touchiness to criticism and name-calling. /(WHAT! YOU TAKE THAT BACK AT ONCE, YOU BOUNDER!)/ When I read that somebody had considered taking legal action against someone who called him a cretin in print I almost fell off my chair. This particular term has been used many times in fanzine reviews in SF fandom; describing certain 'zines as 'shit' or 'garbage' is far from unheard of. Used gratuitously, these terms are just insulting, but used within the context of a review that executes a thorough critical dissection and lays out the entrails for display they can be very sobering. This approach to fanzine reviewing (labelled the "kill-the-f***ers" approach by some of those unfortunate enough to be on the receiving end, and practised in the past by no less a person than BSFA supremo Alan Dorey) leaves you bloodied and shaken for sure, but by Christ it gets through to you, and if you have any intelligence at all you pick yourself up, shake yourself off, and give your 'zine a thorough re-appraisal. The informed criticism of those you send your 'zine to really is the only sure method of finding the right way forward.

Alastair McCraw

Wolverine's new costumes? Makes sense for a subtle hunter man/beast type to dump the bright corral snake rigout, but he sure looks dull. Also the costume exposes his arms, and all that _hair_ must be awfully wearing to draw. I'd say he needs a touch of green for trees and that.

As for Ka-Zar (how do you pronounce it anyway?), his old runs have made him out to be a dumb Tarzan-style hick, a noble and highly intelligent savage, and, most recently (in The X-Men) a somewhat limited leader having to rely on outside help to fry the bad guy. So who can tell what they will do to him this time. From the cover, the only thing I've seen so far, Anderson does a fair rendering of him, one that's raised my hopes for his fill-in on X-Men #144. (Can X-fans survive without John Byrne and Terry Austin on the mag?)

Talking about _that_ little switcheroo, I for one have a feeling that it's not a bad idea. When Gulacy left Master of Kung Fu, I read the mag through its ups and downs until Zeck got better. He'll never be brilliant in the fan's eye view, but he draws a good story, and he and Doug Moench are producing consistently good and even excellent work. It's the stories that always grab me, and the stories that went before, to build up the characters and their links. Something Moench understands, and something that I find is fast becoming a new trademark at Marvel, is the development of strong supporting casts for our heroes and heroines. This has become very noticeable in Iron Man in the past couple of years or so; it's now becoming obvious in Captain America, Thor, Power Man/Iron Fist, Moon Knight, and so on. With Chris Claremont's takeover of Spider-Woman, I confidently expect a growth of independent yet important, breathing people to start appearing.

Incidentally, Claremont's first issue on Spider-Woman (#34) struck me as the best yet. Great story and enjoyable dialogue, like for real, _almost_.

I note a general improvement in the Marvel line over the last year or so, and I think there's better to come. The Jim Shooter interview in The Comics Journal went a long way towards bringing into focus the whole point of comics. Telling stories is what it's all about! The editorial policy he carries out may produce the occasional blooper in some people's eyes, but it looks to me like Marvel's threads are being pulled together again, and I'm looking forward to the tapestry.

Over at DC, you'll not be surprised to hear that I like the New Teen Titans. Very Marvel Wolfman. Very but not quite so. George Perez. Very nice!

Detective 500 did what it was meant to do. It impressed me! Some fine art there, and some fine stories. Only one combination of both though, the lead story "To Kill a Legend". Excellent stuff, giving an insight to the torment of that life. The Batman. The final story, curiously, had a similar theme, but lacked the handling, the feeling, the _sensitivity_, damn it. Immensely enjoyable for different reasons was the Elongated Man story. J.L. Garcia Lopez I remember as being artist on the best issue of Superman this year (oh that lovely dancing scene). He was as fine here, but the script! What with everybody desperately introducing themselves before the panel ran out, and Mike Barr cramming the whole plot into 7 pages (ignoring the prologue for the benefit of people like me who've only read comic adaptations of Poe)...whew! I laughed... a lot.

Not much left to add, for now. However, before anybody thinks of shouting at me, I read the comics first and fanzines later on. And if anybody wants to get together and talk comics sometime, drop me a line.

Simon Bostock

So, did the joint issue work out ok? No, I honestly don't believe so. After I had read it all over twice, I couldn't help feeling that specific areas were inferior to the usual Bem standard, though not wholly, and not so that you could notice it immediately. Take the 4-page strip that should have been in MoI. The art wasn't anything special. But then again, I do subscribe to both Bem and MoI, so the latter isn't all that bad. But I think Mike's rather jumping the gun by producing a 'zine with a full colour cover after but four issues. Even Bem waited for ages before attempting that, and Graphic Sense's tendency to have colour covers has, it seems, destroyed Gez Kelly's creation. At least, that's what it seems like, 'cause it hasn't come out for quite a while now. This is not a bad thing, as Graphic Sense did let ads and The Successors dominate it slightly; Keith Luck's art is rather stylish but bland, and the whole story was rather drawn out. /(I think Mike was under no obligation to wait until MoI #32 before having his first 4-colour cover; besides, his printer isn't set up for 3-colour or 2-colour work, it seems.)/

Concerning the Eagle Awards: although I didn't vote in them, I found them fairly representative of what I'd have put on the form. Of course, 2000AD yet again merited the title of "Favourite Comic", being the only really interesting comic on the UK scene. All the strips are ref-

reshingly good, as are the concepts. The "Favourite Character" award shouldn't have been awarded to Judge Dredd, though, as I think Strontium Dog could have just pipped him to the post. Ezquerra's art would help enormously too, and the stories are superior to the Judge Dredd ones. All it is with Judge Dredd is killers and mad robots, famous jewels being stolen, and well-known people being abducted, to be saved in the nick of time by Joe, etc etc. Strontium Dog's tales are fantastic, and the plots are more feasible than Dredd's; therefore the "Character Most Worthy of Own Book" award should have gone to Alpha. Most of the others were ok, and, having just acquired a few issues of TCJ, I can safely agree as to the favourite fanzine from the US of A. And, of course, Bem deserved an award. /(--blush--)/

About this SF vs comics lark. Ivo Steyn informs us that all the comics fans he's been in touch with read a lot of sf books. Well, that may be true, but it's hardly the case with sf fans. There seems to be a distinct lack of enthusiasm for comics in sf fandom, apart from the odd few fans (aka Steven J. Green) who bother to look in and see how it's getting along. Comics owe an awful lot to sf, especially since most of the comics I've encountered are to do with sf and fantasy (itself a subsidiary of sf). Those few comics which don't concern themselves with sf are crap --take a good look and you'll see why. Even the titles make you cringe.

A comics equivalent to Taff seems like a very good idea, does everyone have to condemn it just because it's an sf fandom brainwave? I for one would probably contribute something towards it should it ever take off. And I'm sure others would too.

By the way, how many do you actually print of Bem? You seem to be hiding the answer by replying "lots". So, are you gonna tell us? /(Currently, it's between 1300 and 1400 copies--roughly two-thirds of the print-run that Richard Burton had reached with Comic Media News. I could get away with 100 less, but I like to keep a good stock of back issues available for new readers.)/

Christopher Melchert — The combined Bem #31 and Masters of Infinity 6 arrived last week sometime. Once again, it's a let-down: I think Bem cannot be so good as it once was. I've been writing that with each new issue for some time now, however. Maybe something is wrong.

It isn't hard to find things to complain about. Take, for example, the first article, "Marvel Six-in-One: the Pad-a-Plot Project" by Steve McGregor. He begins by talking about having to decide (as we all probably do every time there's a price hike) which comics to quit collecting, which to continue with. Then he tells us the "Project Pegasus" issues of Marvel Two-In-One are doing well in the back-issue market, and that he would like to appraise what aspects make them popular with fans "in terms of my personal quality scale of collectability." It's funny this personal quality scale is not used to rate these six issues of Marvel Two-in-One. We don't even learn whether McGregor himself has continued to buy the title. Rather, he concludes by telling us "it's done my Two-in-One sales a world of good", "it" presumably being the five issues worth of plot-padding he's talked about in the previous paragraph.

McGregor does identify weak plotting a lot better than he talks about art. For example, he gives us half a paragraph of relevant examples to back up his point that the Thing and Quasar's fight was improbably motivated. But when he says that Perez has laid out his issues of Two-in-One more imaginatively than Byrne, does he cite a single example? No. He makes some great, sweeping statements about artistic lineages that call for long articles of explanation; for example, "Byrne hasn't accomplished half as much as Adams did; Perez has shown us one way Smith might have developed if he had remained in comics (which really would have been no development at all); Gulacy is a Steranko with more artistic ability but less vision, and so it goes." Adams probably has contributed substantially to the advance of comic art: most artists nowadays concern themselves with visually exciting layouts much more than formerly, and Adams did a lot to introduce that kind of layout. Less clear is why Byrne should be blamed for not being equally innovative. McGregor's remark about Perez and Smith is very strange. Neither is an artist I've actively collected, I admit. But I have the impression that Smith's last comic-book work was increasingly detailed, sometimes to the point of delicacy. I don't see the same kind of detail (and contrast) in Perez. The only example of Perez's artwork that McGregor cites is Quasar standing with feet four feet apart and crouched to shake hands. Is this what Smith was moving toward? I observe that McGregor makes no such sweeping statements about writers, whom he seems so much more comfortable talking about.

The next article is "Fantasy Unlimited" by Mike Taylor. I suppose it's part of Masters of Infinity. It wasn't bad, but I do wish Mike had discussed the articles he talks about, not just noted their titles and subject matter. What makes them worth remembering, after all? "The great quantity of material covered in this issue," he says at one point, "makes it impossible to give an accurate account here--suffice it to say that very rarely have subjects such as this been covered in such depth in a British fanzine." Huh? Who put space limitations on Mike? He's the editor! Maybe if the articles in this issue of FU had been short and superficial he would have found time to talk about them.

Kathleen Glancy talks about a plot against women. She exaggerates, I'm sure, for comic effect. But I'd rather hear her speculate on why there aren't more female comics fans (and why there should be so many more female readers of horror and romance comics than of super-hero). Incidentally, art is not traditionally a realm of women. Name top painters (Rothko, Miro, Pollock, Picasso), composers (Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Berg, Bartok), filmmakers (Hitchcock, Ford, Welles, Godard)--whatever you like, the women's names do not pop easily to mind. We've no reason to believe that Steve Rogers has any kind of taste, so it's Bernie's falling for him I would question.

"A Marasmus of the Mind" was an enjoyable change on Mike Taylor's side. "... Five years these damn hormones" didn't sound right (e.g., only five years?), but I liked it that the daydreamer did not find satisfaction, as comic-book daydreamers usually do. Mike Collins' artwork was sometimes effective; for example, I liked the close close-up of Angus's eye as he feels his loneliness (page 2/panel 5). More often, however, the unevenness of the drawing detracted from the story. The main culprit appears to be poorly integrated swiping; e.g., Angus (reference used) and Joanna (no reference), page 1/panel 3. (And what a funny arm Joanna has, there.

Like you, I mostly buy fanzines for the articles. It doesn't feel good to've spent money on "Oink!" though. I don't see the point, frankly, of printing an article whose author considers it nonsensical. If Mr Langley is joking, here's one reader, at least, who hasn't got it. He talks for several paragraphs about a Warlock story Jim Starlin wrote. (Starlin drew it, too, but Langley doesn't talk about the art.) At first glance, Langley says, it seems fair enough to ridicule John Romita for altering artwork; but on closer examination it is unfair and childish. "If someone does something you don't like (even if it's his job), then you ridicule him, no?" What would Langley rather Jim Starlin did, punch him in the mouth? He does refer much later to "necessary aspects of the business," so that we may deduce he considers it necessary for John Romita to redraw panels. If it's so necessary, why doesn't Marvel talk about it? I recall how Romita touched up a page in Nick Fury (SHIELD #2), redrawing a telephone so the receiver would be on the hook, not off, and replacing a long shot of Fury and Val embracing with a photostat of Fury's gun in its holster, from panel 1. Was this necessary? Starlin got it, too. Every issue, somebody back in New York redrew Warlock's crotch and closed up the front of Gamora's costume. Some, I suppose, would consider bulging crotches inappropriate to literature for small children. I wonder how many small children actually read Warlock, though; at any rate, Marvel letters and editorial pages certainly give you the impression they consider themselves producers of comics for more than small children. (Besides, don't most fans remember wondering, as small children, where Superman's genitals were? Little children don't need that kind of protection.) Langley objects to the tower of trash the clowns in the story keep building up, and the diamonds in the trash that represent the work of Starlin and select others. Well, Langley himself earlier mentions Adams, Smith, & Russell as examples of "the finer comic artists." Does he consider it coincidence, no reproach to Marvel, that all three have quit working for that company?

I must admit to liking Langley's characterization of the "placating, don't-have-to-think-about-it artists like Joe Staton and John Buscema." I also liked the way he put the Philistines' objection to their work: "they aren't 'good comix'". The "x" in "comix" does justice, I think, to their contention that comics should be fun, just the way they used to be.

There's much less to like in KW's "Looking Back (in Bemusement)." I should guess that K. Williams is older than I am: 1963, only 17 years ago, is the first year I actively followed favourite titles and collected them. But I still question Williams' recollection of the Fantastic Four: "not only a daft outfit with unoriginal powers, they were always bloody squabbling." Plastic Man and the original Human Torch are obvious precursors to Mr Fantastic and the FF's Human Torch, but they were both long gone by 1960. If Golden-Age precedents were a problem, KW should never have liked the Hal Jordan Green Lantern, either. I vividly remember the first Marvel I ever read: Journey Into Mystery #84, as I later found out. I was not put off because Don Blake had more

problems than I had. I was put off because the art and story were so weird, so unlike the DC comics I was used to (edited by Jack Schiff and Mort Weisinger, the artists made to imitate Dan Barry).

By now, you've probably come to expect me to question your writers' comments about artwork. KW says it "wasn't too bad: even when I started there were the likes of Swan, Anderson, Heath et al, about--on the other hand there were also the likes of Elias, Ely, Baily, et al." I remember Lee Elias as the pedestrian artist of Green Arrow, behind Superman and Batman in alternating issues of World's Finest. I don't know who Ely and Baily were; do you? /(William (Bill) Ely worked for DC up to the mid sixties, on Rip Hunter and the mystery books; and I'm surprised you don't remember Bernard Baily, the man who, by replacing Mike Kaluta on "The Spawn of Frankenstein" in PHANTOM STRANGER 27-30, gave many a comics fan a rather severe jolt. In the period Keith was talking about, he was involved with Cave Carson, Prince Ra-Man, and the Green Glob. Both men were also active for DC in the forties--as was Lee Elias who, beside his Green Arrow work, also drew Cave Carson, Eclipso, the later Adam Strange stories, Tommy Tomorrow, and Ultra.)/ Presumably, they were not very good. But what is Murphy Anderson doing there among the supposed best? I think I recall seeing Anderson named, not long ago, as a good example of fandom's tendency to exalt finish over substance. He's a dull penciller, and there's nothing special about his noodling inking style, either. I'll grant KW Curt Swan, who was drawing twice up back then, to be better inked and printed than he is now; but why Russ Heath? He was drawing the Haunted Tank back then; if KW actually read those egregious comics for Russ Heath's artwork, why didn't he notice Joe Kubert's far superior work on Sgt Rock and other war strips? /(Maybe it was the Brave & Bold work Keith was thinking of; or would you believe Sea Devils #11, and the many covers he did for that title?)/ I wonder, too, why Carmine Infantino's name is missing. I suspect bad taste. "Anyway, all that really concerned me about the artwork was that it should be clear and dynamic; so that I could <u>see</u> what was happening, and by exercising my imagination a little <u>feel</u> it." One: if KW thought so highly of dynamism, why pick Swan, Anderson, and Heath as the best, and why ignore Kirby? Two: looking at KW's later comparison of Craig Russell and Sal Buscema, it appears that KW upholds the same criteria today as he did twenty years ago. Kev Langley observes that one may expect a mature person's taste to have changed since he first began reading comics, twenty years ago. In 1963, my favourite artists were Curt Swan and Wayne Boring. I don't think I observed the difference between Carmine Infantino on The Flash and Gil Kane on Green Lantern. I'm glad my taste has broadened.

Even on the writing, however, I disagree strongly. Mr Williams claims at the end to dispose of two myths, the first being that continuity was invented by Marvel. "Actually, various DC mags were stronger on continuity in the early '60's than in the mid- and later '60's." Do their titles leap instantly to your mind, Martin, so that giving examples would have been superfluous? Or does KW have a weak case it'd be hard to support? /(It's not really my specialist subject -- but how about Action Comics, Sea Devils, and perhaps House of Secrets?)/ "Continued stories as such were <u>rare</u>, but far from non-existent. In any case, continuity and continued stories date right back to the birth of Superman and before, way back in the <u>'30's</u> --so where this idea that Marvel pioneered such things in the '60's came from I really can't see." Let me try to give KW some idea.

Continuity means more than "continued stories," in which it takes two or more issues to defeat a single villain. It means that you could tell Amazing Spider-Man #11 came after Amazing Spider-Man #10, although Spider-Man fought a different villain in each issue (the Enforcers in 10, Dr Octopus for the second time in 11). By contrast, it made no difference whatever whether the story in Flash #135 came after or before the story in Flash #136. Wally West has an other-dimensional pen-pal at the end of Flash 135, but we never hear of her again. Occasionally, an early 'sixties Flash story would refer to a previous one; e.g., whenever Captain Cold came back in love with someone else, or when Barry Allen and Scudder the Mirror Master were both graduated from a self-improvement course. But this is not continuity. It was plain as could be that the course was introduced as a gag to conclude one Mirror Master story, and revived six issues later because Julius Schwartz and John Broome had an idea how they could use it in another Mirror Master story, later on. In none of the intervening issues is there the slightest hint that Barry Allen was taking this course (nor was there ever a reference to it in subsequent issues). Wally West's other-dimensional pen-pal is a contrary example of an ending they never did decide to use as a springboard for a new story; hence it was allowed to hang. Nothing like this could happen to Peter Parker without there being continual reference to it in succeeding issues.

Secondly, KW tells us there was no lack of characterization at DC in those days; rather, "in stories that seldom ran more than 8 or 9 pages (often less), it had to be conveyed <u>concisely</u>, in action, brief (somewhat forced) dialogue, and captions. There wasn't the <u>opportunity</u> in that sort of format for detailed expositions of the sort seen in later years" (or, more to the point, of the sort seen in contemporary Marvel comics). Why? Well, over at DC they chose a format that did not allow for "detailed expositions"; at Marvel, Stan Lee chose a format that did. KW ought to tell us about the compensating advantages of the eight-or-nine-page format. Instead, he claims it was there, just conveyed more concisely. Yeah, like when Iris is described as Barry's fiancée in one issue; somewhat later they are in love with each other; somewhat later, then, Barry Allen explains to Iris's father they're just good friends? (This particular devolution was pointed out in a Flash lettercol, perhaps by Irene Vartanoff.) One can imagine reasons why Barry might lie to Iris's father; what's clear is that Barry Allen's love life was not a vital part of the series. /(Both Barry and Iris thought of their relationship in those terms in Flash 134's "The Threat of the Absent-Minded Professor" -- and the "romance in reverse" was blamed on "the faulty memory of their matchmaker, author John Broome." And since I've located the letter, I can reveal that it was written by some fellow in Oklahoma City called E. Nelson Bridwell ...whatever happened to him, I wonder?)/

More important, KW misunderstands "characterization" just as he previously did, wilfully or no, "continuity." (At least he has plenty of company, including some professional writers.) The Stan Lee revolution was not merely to add character exposition scenes as background to super-hero action: he gave personal meaning to the super-hero action itself. The Flash, Green Lantern, Superman and the others all fought criminals out of civic duty. Flash would hear about a crime on the radio and rush out to catch the perpetratot. The Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, and Thor's enemies attacked them personally. Dr Doom wanted to defeat the only living rival to his genius, the Executioner took Don Blake and Jane Foster captive, and every time Spider-Man tackled a villain it was to make up for not having tackled the crook who was to shoot his uncle. Moreover, he got involved with villains because of his picture-taking, because Betty Brant's brother got mixed up with the mob, because Mysterio, the Green Goblin, and Kraven challenged him personally, because he was at the circus himself when the Ringmaster took it over, and so on.

I usually gripe about the articles in Bem. But everyone knows you read Bem for the lettercol. That's what bothers me: how flat the lettercol is becoming. What is worst is the way you guys contribute. For example, Ivo Steyn comes forward with a lively paragraph about turning another adult onto comics, and what is the wet-blanket response? "I just wonder why you bothered in the first place; does it matter that the world is full of people who don't like comics?" Good grief, what is wrong with sharing pleasures?

It's always easier to comment on somebody else's statement than to start from nothing yourself -- look what I've been doing throughout this letter. Therefore, I expect your editorial comments to be relevant always, and usually better reasoned and supported than the letters you are commenting on.

/(Well, all I was going to do now was apologise for not having the space to put in any more of your letter, Christopher. How'd we do this time?)/

"NEVERWHERE" --continued from page 14...

Manfully resisting any reply to that last question, Ivo responded:

Yes! I disagree with your assessment of Neverwhere. On all counts! Excellent story? Hah, don't make me sneer. Plotted with many warring and contra- unevenly, one dictory elements, <u>one</u>, count em, interesting character, and abysmal scripting...but that may be a matter of taste. De gustibus, etc. Beautifully drawn? Beautiful, yes. Beautifully drawn, no. Corben has been described as a man with an excellent colour sense, superb airbrush technique, and very little drawing ability. I agree, you don't. Again, it's a matter of taste. Adult interest? Here I must become rude. If your idea of adult interest is sex and violence, or, to be precise, the obsessively explicit depiction thereof, then you and I are two fundamentally different persons.

As for your comparisons between N/w and various films, I'd rather compare it to a more similar object: the Strnad-written "New Tales of the Arabian Nights". Every mistake Corben made, every excess in N/w is left out here. The sex scenes are treated with more subtlety, even humour (think of the grotesque "Den's Farewell" sequel to N/w. Pathetic!), the violence is still there, but it's not the obsessive violence of Neverwhere. I don't know how many of New Tales' good points are due to Strnad, but it makes N/w look the silly, crude garbage it is. However, what is really important is that at last I have the luxury of the last word!

It's strange...uncanny, almost...but I could swear that the last sentence of the last paragraph is in Mike Cruden's handwriting, rather than Ivo's... -ML

Bemuscene

BATMAN #333 (March)
"The China Syndrome" by Marv Wolfman, Irv Novick & Frank McLaughlin; Robin and Catwoman in "Shanghaied" by Marv Wolfman, Irv Novick & John Celardo

If comic books have any aspirations of becoming something other than four-colour kiddie fodder, several traditions will have to be laid to rest. One such tradition is the use of ridiculously contrived, foreign accent, dialogue. For example:

"Captain Torrents? I'm Bruce Wayne..."

The reply "Ah, of course, chap. The American millionaire, wot?"

or "Ve cannot return vifout der Batman, Gustav vill haf our heads!"

Primarily due to this, hopefully temporary, absence of judgement on Wolfman's part, this issue is the worst of his tenure on The Batman. Another factor which contributes to this is the rather confused (and unnecessarily complicated) plotline. However, there are one or two redeeming factors present, the major one being a refreshing/exciting escape and chase sequence on pages 4 through 8, which has a certain something which is alien to the rest of the issue.

Paul Levitz in the fan press has been hyping "The Lazarus Affair" as "the best Batman series to appear in the book in the last 10 years."

It is not. -Stephen McGonagle

X-MEN #143 (March)
"Demon" by Claremont, Byrne & Austin

Kathleen Glancy is just going to hate this issue! Because this time around, we are given what is virtually a Sprite solo story, which Claremont and Byrne use to do a bit of character development on the newest X-Person. And it's quite nicely done, too.

By re-introducing a demon from #96, the usual build-up-to-the-fight is done away with, enabling Mr Claremont to cast a quick glance at all the other X-Men and still have enough space to do full justice to Sprite's first big fight. The whole battle is well paced so that the action never flags, but there is still enough space to examine how Sprite reacts to and copes with her first life and death situation on her own.

Unfortunately there is, early on, a brief incident concerning Wolverine (who else?) that is really clumsy, and strikes one like a sore thumb in terms of his own character development. Still, on the whole, a nice solid issue as usual. My only worry about this book is that the writers seem determined to give each X-Man a fair crack of the whip, but with the introduction of Sprite and the return of Angel, and with Cyclops out on his own, I can't help feeling that things are beginning to get spread a bit thinly. After all, there are only about 22 pages an issue. Still, we shall see... -Cliff Joseph

Lest anyone might think that DC had the monopoly on heart-cockle-warming Christmas presents, here's Marvel's offering. Now I realise that in saying the following I shall be incurring the wrath of Kath Glancy--something I wouldn't normally do, nor wish to -- but I <u>like</u> Kitty Pryde... cuteness and all. (So nyaah!)(Maybe it's just 'cause I have this thing about wide-eyed, long-legged, pubescent young girls) (Er, perhaps you'd better not put that in, Martin...) (Wouldn't dream of it, K! -ML) And it just so happens that this is the first X-Men story in quite a while that I actually found <u>satisfying</u>. Maybe

I <u>am</u> a sucker, but <u>I</u> found it a nice enjoyable <u>X</u>-mas entertainment. Everyone else have a pleasant Xmas? -KW

DC COMICS PRESENTS #32 (April)
"The Super-Prisoners of Love" by Conway, Schaffenberger & Colletta; "Whatever Happened To Mark Merlin and Prince Ra-Man" by Tiefenbacher, Saviuk & Colletta

Why is it that Gerry Conway seems incapable of writing a DCCP with a female co-star without dragging in some tedious "Lonely Super-Hearts" routine? Two issues ago we had Black Canary's lovesick quest for the ghost of her dead husband, and now we are faced with a mischievous godling, Eros, causing Wonder Woman & Superman to fall in love.

Doubtless Conway's fans (well, the law of averages dictates that there must be at least <u>one</u>) will say of this story that it was "experimental", an attempt at doing a story without a battle, or a real villain, or any number of other convenient get-outs.

Well <u>I</u> say it's Conway's usual brand of trashy sexist bullshit, and I say to hell with it. <u>And</u> him.

As to "Whatever Happened To Prince Ra-Man", does <u>anyone</u> really care? This feature is a neat idea, but DC keep inexplicably wasting it on predestined losers like Congorilla and the erstwhile Mark Merlin. Why don't they get their collective fingers out and give fandom the story we've been waiting to see, namely, "Whatever Happened To The Inferior Five?"

Come on, Jenette, get <u>organized</u>.

-Howard Stangroom

EPIC ILLUSTRATED #4 (Winter)
"Delloran Revisited" by James Starlin; "The Dreaming City" by Roy Thomas & P. Craig Russell; episode 3 of "Almuric" by Roy Thomas & Tim Conrad; "Elephant Grass" by Marc Hempel; "Retrospect" by B.K. Taylor & James Fox; "Survivors" by Paul Kirshner; "Solar Plexus" by Rick Veitch; and "Sleeping Dogs" by Harlan Ellison & Ken Steacy.

The only story that I really buy EPIC for is "Almuric", though I do read the others, of course. This, by Robert E. Howard (you know him: Conan, etc), is the best of the lot in this issue, with superb art and fine adapting. A work of art almost. The story concerns Esau Cairn (funny name for an inhabitant of Earth), who is warped into another dimension by a mad professor after being chased by cops and hiding in the professor's house. The world he lands in is Almuric, a name created by the nutty professor, and whose inhabitants are grotesque and vicious beasts who try and carve Esau to shreds. All very well, until a native girl helps him. The art is stylish and detailed --it could become an all-time great among EPIC work, even better than Starlin's art on his continuing story "Metamorphosis Odyssey".

The other stories in the mag are okay, but nothing special. "The Dreaming City" was good, but could have done with better art, by Corben maybe. "Sleeping Dogs" was an Ellison tale, so was bound to be good, spoilt only by the art. The rest of the strips are mostly crap, a fine example being "Elephant Grass" which is amusing...but pathetic.

I'm not saying I didn't like it, because I did. But is the poorer material really necessary? -Simon Bostock

DETECTIVE COMICS #500 (March)
Batman in "To Kill A Legend" by Alan Brennert & Dick Giordano; Slam Bradley in "The 'Too Many Cooks...' Caper" by Len Wein & Jim Aparo; "Once Upon A Time" by Snoopy & Walt Simonson; Elongated Man in "The Final Mystery of Edgar Allan Poe" by Mike W. Barr & J.L. Garcia Lopez; "The Batman Encounters Gray Face" by Walter Gibson & Tom Yeates; Hawkman in "The Strange Death of Doctor Erdel" by Paul Levitz & Joe Kubert; and Batman and Deadman in "What Happens When a Batman Dies?" by Cary Bates, Carmine Infantino & Bob Smith

I don't suppose for a moment that I <u>need</u> to plug this ish--anyone with any real interest in, or feeling for, comic-books will have bought it, and any with even the merest iota of sentiment concerning the form and/or characters will have loved and lauded it. It's what it says it is: a celebration; a celebration of characters, and legends, and art forms, and concepts, and approaches, and styles, and of everything, in short, that we in fandom (presumably) hold dear. Anyone who fails to appreciate this work-of-love magnum opus gets my nomination for the "Philistine-of-the-Year" award. It's art and craft; it's past, present, and future; it's fan and pro; it's harmony; it's nice.

Another Delightful Christmas present from Santa DC. You're doing well, fellas -- I can almost forgive you some of your past transgressions. But what the devil can you do for an <u>encore</u>? I shall expect something pretty stupendous when ADVENTURE #500 comes round.

-K. Williams

FAERIES
by Alan Lee & Brian Froud (Pan Books)

As Geoff Gilbertson noted in his book "The Dark Gods" (written in collaboration with Anthony Robertson), "the word 'superstition' cannot reasonably be applied to a belief in fairies. Up until comparatively recent times, many country folk, especially in Celtic countries, believed in these creatures simply because they themselves, or others they considered trustworthy, had encountered them."

For the benefit of those unfamiliar with traditional fairy lore, I should first of all make it clear that today's conventional image of a fairy as a pretty, diaphanous creature with airy gossamer wings owes more to fiction than to recorded fact. Fairies were, as far as the human eye could tell, quite ordinary men and women. The only strange thing about them was their small stature--hence the term "the Little People" (they were also called "the Very Good People", "the Gentry", etc).

'Faeries' is in my opinion something of a landmark in the field of fantasy art. It's a handsome 192-page coffee-table edition, containing over 200 full-colour paintings and

drawings. The text, by Alan Lee, gathers together a host of obscure facts from the folklore of a dozen different countries and presents them in a simple, lucid form. The result is an entertaining and highly readable exploration of Celtic fairy lore. Brian Froud's illustrations complement the text perfectly, giving an extraordinary conceptual approach to fantasy art.

Froud's imagery is extremely vital — his fairies are derived both from picturesque legend and reported fact, and they are most definitely not 'Tolkienesque' (i.e. cute). Instead they leap, gambol and cavort over the book's 192 pages in a kind of hazy, delirious phantasmagoria. Their leering, horribly animated faces resemble hypnagogic images — you know, those disembodied faces you sometimes see floating in front of your mind's eye just before you fall asleep.

Froud's compositions are powerful and dramatic, yet they contain a pronounced element of humour. They are also meticulously detailed, giving an authentic vision of he past.

Those interested in actual encounters with fairies in modern times are referred to Jaques Vallee's paperback 'Passport to Magonia' (a classic of its kind). On the other hand, for those who prefer fantasy to reality, Froud and Lee's 'Faeries' is highly recommended. It is one of the definitive works on the subject of the Little People. -Pete Scott

FANTASTIC FOUR #228 (March)
"Ego-Spawn" by Doug Moench, Bill Sienkiewicz & Joe Sinnott

The FF is getting to be pretty boring these days, and this issue does not change that trend. Not that it's actually bad, it's just that nothing really happens--and it doesn't happen slowly, at that. Johnny Storm is sighing wistfully over his millionth girlfriend, and Franklin is given a blood pressure test which, God knows why, involves plugging him into a biofeedback machine. Naturally this causes his powers to play up a little, hence "Ego-Spawn" which gives his family something to fight.

The trouble is Franklin's powers have been playing up for nearly a hundred issues now, so having the FF keeping on being surprised by his powers is wearing very thin by now. Still, the art's quite reasonable, and at least this issue seems to point towards some kind of resolution of Franklin's problems, so I'll stick with the FF for a while. After all, something has got to happen soon. -Cliff Joseph

JONAH HEX #46 (March)
"Death in the Grass" by Michael Fleisher, Dick Ayers & Tony DeZuniga; and Scalphunter in "The Torture, The Truth" by Gerry Conway, Dick Ayers & Romeo Tanghal

This is the first issue of Jonah Hex I've picked up since the poor man was stuffed a little while back in the Jonah Hex Spectacular. Fleisher still seems to be doing a steady job on this feature churning out variants of old 'B' movie westerns, and this issue is no exception.

Jonah, complete with temporary paralysis of his back, is pursued into tall Buffalo Grass by three bad types who take exception to Jonah marrying a 'coolie'.

Will Jonah survive?
Was the right person stuffed?

-Stephen McGonagle

DAZZLER #1 (March)
"So Bright This Star" by Tom DeFalco, John Romita Jr, & Alfredo Alcala

Well, the cover's very nice...but a mutant lazerium who roller discos to Pink Floyd?

Obviously originally created to cash in on the disco explosion, Dazzler (minus the "Disco") seems to me, after reading this premiere issue, to be a pretty empty character, who, although she makes an adequate supporting character (as shown by her debut in the X-Men), is not really suitable for her own title.

Despite appearances by Spidey, the Avengers and the Eagle-Men, there seemed very little in the book plot & script-wise, apart from Mr DeFalco's "in-joke" musical references.

The saving grace was the art, which, in certain places, was a joy to look at, due in part to Alcala's inks; check out the scenes involving the enchanting villainess.

Hit or miss? I choose the latter, but let's see what next issue brings. By the way, is it my imagination, or are the art pages smaller than usual?

-Martin Kravetz

I guess this episode of 'Marvel Super-Stars Unlimited' isn't too bad, really...except for this boring Dazzler character who seems to take up almost

CONQUISTADOR

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BECKENHAM KENT

To all our customers both old and new, our change of address is now complete and our service to fandom back to normal. Send all orders and enquiries to the new address above.

A shorter list this month as the move and Xmas festivities have been a busy time.

X-Men G/s #1 @ £30 . G/s #2 @ £4 Ann #3 £1-95 Ann #4 60p
X-Men #56 £4-50, 58,59,60,61,63 £3-95 112,114 60p, 137 £1
Avengers #8(FN) £7, 10(VG) £4, 14,17,18,19 (FN) £3-25, 121-125 £1-75
126-130 £1-50, 131-140 £1-25, 141-152 95p, 93 £6, 94-99 £3
100 £3-25, 183 £1, 200 £1 . Ann #7 £2-50.
Defenders #1 £11 . #8,10, £2-50 13,14 £1-95
Marvel Feature #1 £9, 2 £4, 3 £3-75. Marvel 2 in 1 Ann #2 £2-95
Captain Marvel #31-33 £2-95 Iron Fist #1 £2-50 2 £1-95
Iron Fist #8-14 @ 85p . Micronauts #1 £1-50, 2-5 £1-25, 6-10 85p
Rom #1 50p 2-3 40p, 4-5 60p, 6-9 ASp 10up 30p
Conan #2 £16, #3 £20, 4,6, £5-50 7,8,9, £9 37 £2-75
Warlock #1 £4-25 . Marvel Premiere #1 £4, 3 £3-95, 4 £2-50
Spiderman #121, 122 £9 Our Love Story (Steranko) #5 £9
She Hulk #1 50p 2-5 40p. Dazzler #1 35p 2 30p
Moonknight #1 25p Warren Spirit #1 £3-50 #8 £2-75
Warren Spirit Special, All Colour (RARE) £5.
E.C.s Two Fisted Tales #30(VG) £16, #34(VG) £17
Tales From Crypt #36(FN) £22, #44(VG) £17
Crime Suspensestories #26(VFN) £16
Plus all the usual early rare & n.d. items, H.M., Starlog, etc.
All prices per item.
Post as usual 40p min 1-5 comics
5p/comic 12p/mag
£2 max

half the book...

Or, to put it another way: to include that many guest-stars points to real desperation--which I think is entirely warranted. Even the presence of half the Marvel Universe isn't likely to do much for this ludicrously feeble concept. Let's just hope that this book folds as quickly as it ought to... (Can't think of any good reason why it shouldn't.) -K. Williams

MARVEL PREVIEW #24 (Winter)
"Paradox" by Bill Mantlo & Val Mayerik

This is the most incredible character concept in the history of illustrated fantasy; I know this because the cover told me so. It also caused not a little controversy between editor Lynn Graeme and some of Marvel's powers that be, because of its nudity, and appeared late because of this; hours of fun can be had by speculating what page 32 was like before some measure of decorum was introduced!

It's cheering that one of Marvel's main, most reliable writers can still strike out in a new direction like this, and that Marvel are able to find a place for it, even on a one-off basis --but where any second story of this character could appear must remain uncertain.

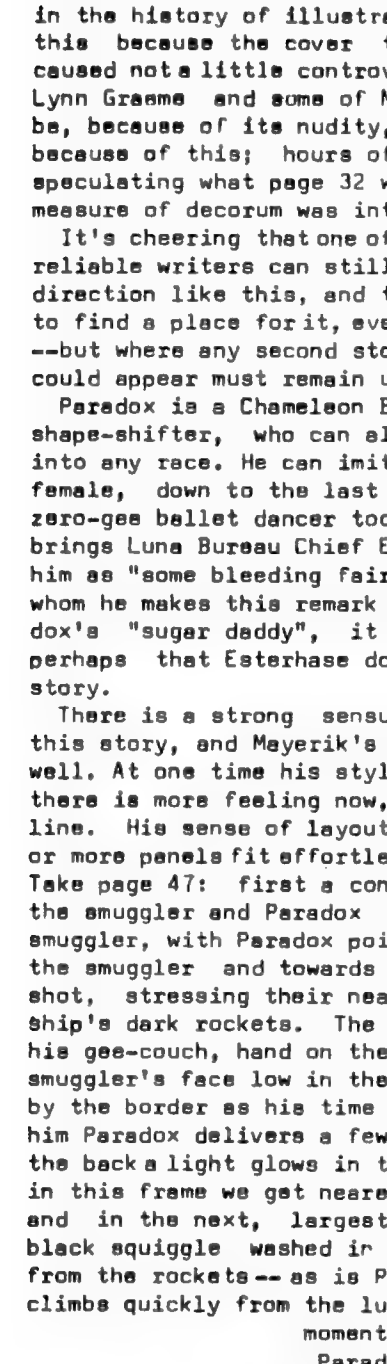
Paradox is a Chameleon Boy-type; that is, a shape-shifter, who can alter his physiology into any race. He can imitate anyone, male or female, down to the last detail...and he's a zero-gee ballet dancer too, whose performance brings Luna Bureau Chief Esterhase to refer to him as "some bleeding fairy". Since the man to whom he makes this remark appears to be Paradox's "sugar daddy", it is understandable perhaps that Esterhase does not survive this story.

There is a strong sensual, sexual flow to this story, and Mayerik's art reinforces this well. At one time his style was smoother, but there is more feeling now, and more power per line. His sense of layout is strong, and six or more panels fit effortlessly on many a page. Take page 47: first a confrontation between the smuggler and Paradox in the shape of the smuggler, with Paradox pointing accusingly at the smuggler and towards us. Then a longer shot, stressing their nearness to the space-ship's dark rockets. The pilot rests back on his gee-couch, hand on the stick. Fourth, the smuggler's face low in the frame, half cut off by the border as his time runs out, as behind him Paradox delivers a few last words, and at the back a light glows in the rocket tube. It's in this frame we get nearest to the smuggler--and in the next, largest frame he's a mere black squiggle washed in white flame roaring from the rockets -- as is Paradox. The rocket climbs quickly from the lunar dome, allowing a moment of suspense -- has Paradox perished too? The frame is soundless, and copy-free. No emotion. The last 3 frames swoop in again on Paradox coming in through a scarred, coffin-shaped air-lock in the form of a Mercurian (one able to survive such high temperatures). The scrawny, carrot-nosed creature doesn't shake or shiver...but Mayerik's rendition of the scene catches his conflicting emotions and condition, even before, closer now & staring straight ahead, in the ninth and last frame he has reverted to his habitual human form.

Bill Mantlo's plot too has much that is sexual. Paradox's shape-shifting leads to him fighting a woman in her own image; the drug "firsflight", which heats the body even as it brings ecstacy, and will, if no antidote is taken, cause the taker to burst into flames; the relationship between the ambassador and his wife, the wife and Paradox; the illusions.

There's a fine sequence as Paradox, in the form of a dwarfish, bug-eyed Lunan, descends to the lowest mining level inside the moon to visit an old friend. A Terran here would stand out -- so he's discrete. But why, I wonder, does he leave his old friend in his own form? It moves the plot along, certainly, but it makes Paradox seem a bit green to be a top Terran agent.

A good, stylish Paul Gulacy cover; why, they've even used a better grade of paper inside. This title is one to watch and enjoy these days, so don't forget that Marvel still publish black & white comic magazines. -C.N. Padgett

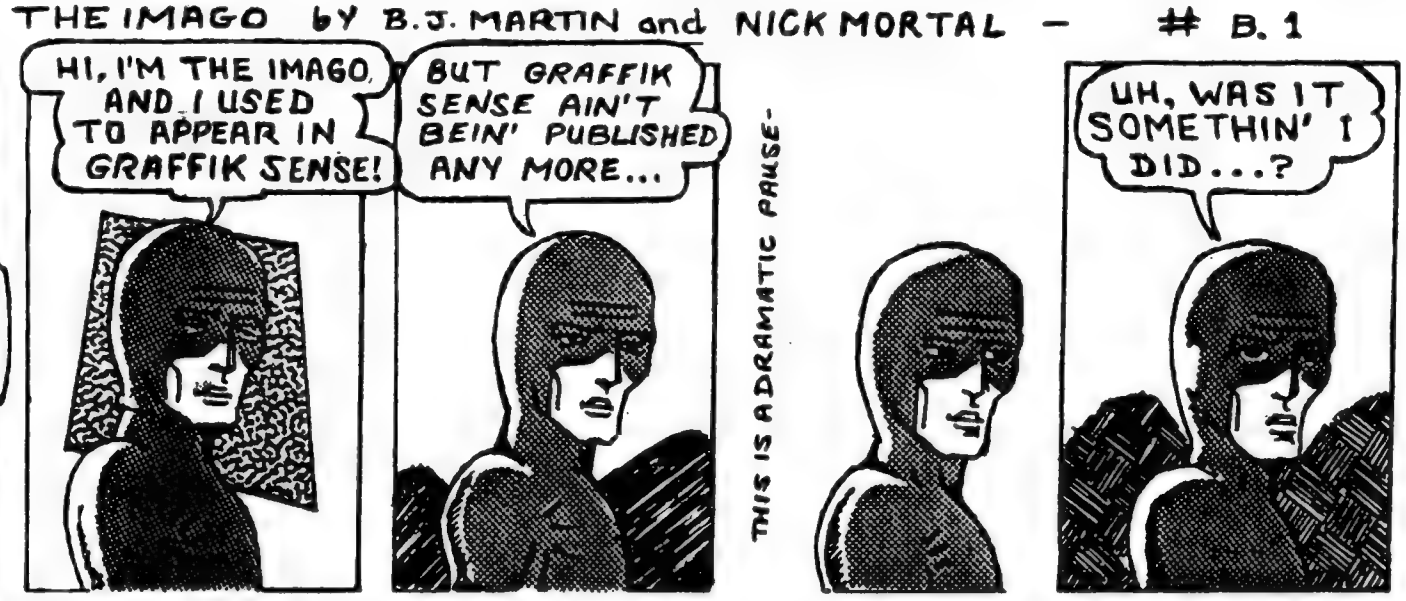


PEANUTS JUBILEE
by Charles M. Schulz (Penguin Books)

"Peanuts" by Charles M. Schulz grew out of an earlier, less refined strip called "Li'l Folks", which took the form of several individual gag cartoons grouped together on a page rather than a sequential 4- or 5-panel narrative. "Peanuts" itself first appeared in a handful of American newspapers on October 2nd 1950. At the time it featured only four regular characters: Shermy, Patty, Charlie Brown and Snoopy. (Snoopy was in the habit of walking on all fours in those days, though as his popularity grew he gradually adopted an upright posture.) In time, the rest of the 'Peanuts' cast developed and became part of Americana: Linus, Marcie, Woodstock, josé Peterson et al. As the legend grew, so too did the commercial empire: foreign language "Peanuts" anthologies were published all over the world, and the merchandising of Charlie Brown/Snoopy toys, fancy goods & assorted junk paraphernalia reached epic proportions. In fact, the extent to which the "Peanuts" characters have been absorbed into the popular imagination over the last thirty years really is quite amazing.

'Peanuts Jubilee' is a handsome coffee-table edition containing a host of new perceptions about Charles Schulz, his work, and his views and impressions of the comic strip form. It contains 134 full-colour episodes together with a comprehensive text by Schulz himself in which he outlines his philosophy in clear, lucid terms. He emerges as a decent, fairly likeable chap with a simple, uncluttered view of life. His work as a writer is consistently sensitive and tasteful. His best strips contain a strong, almost profound insight into the myriad insecurities of childhood. They often hit home with a poignant moment or gentle moral lesson. His work as an illustrator always evinces a strong sense of composition and design. Though simplistic, it is very functional. What's more, it always fulfils criterion number 1; it communicates.

In his text, Schulz explains the origin of the strip itself, and the creative genesis of many episodes. He also discloses that, of all the strip's long-running gags, American President Ronald Reagan's favourite is the one in which Lucy invites Charlie Brown to run up and kick a football, and then pulls it away at the last minute (this has been going on for twenty-odd years now). Interestingly, I've always found this particular theme threadbare at best --it's too firmly rooted in the slapstick tradition to be really funny. This is just one of several


THE IMAGO by B.J. MARTIN and NICK MORTAL - # B.1
HI, I'M THE IMAGO, AND I USED TO APPEAR IN GRAFFIK SENSE!
BUT GRAFFIK SENSE AIN'T BEIN' PUBLISHED ANY MORE...
THIS IS A DRAMATIC PAUSE-
UH, WAS IT SOMETHIN' I DID...?

areas in which Ronnie and I don't quite see eye to eye. Still, it's fascinating to think of him slapping his thigh and bellowing with bestial laughter every time Charlie Brown goes flying.

'Peanuts Jubilee' is an entertaining, richly rewarding book. Though it was first published back in '75, it's still relevant today. If you still have any Christmas book tokens left, this is as good a way as any to get rid of them. So go to it.

-Pete Scott

ADVENTURE #479 (March)
"To Save a World" by Marv Wolfman, Carmine Infantino & Larry Mahlstedt; "The Red Death" and "As The Silver Fog Rolls In..." by Wolfman, Infantino & Dennis Jensen

Dagnabit, this is fun! I must admit that ever since this project was announced I have had certain qualms about it; so easy for it to be as "high-camp" as the original "DHFH" series, and/or excrutiatingly awful...but, fortunately, it ain't. It's just damn good fun! New heroes & villains by the cartload--Sunspot, Mega Boy, Ice, Color Commando, Grasshopper, Doomster, Composite Man, Twilight, Windsong, and Captain Electron, vs Flying Buttress, Red Death, Silver Fog, et al...and that's just in one issue! Made me feel like a 12-year-old again. (Which is something I haven't been for quite a while...)

I'm almost tempted to send in contributions myself. (After all, if Harlan--age 46--Ellison can enter into the spirit of things...) A very nice Xmas present from DC -- thanks, guys. -K. Williams

X-MEN #144 (April)
"Even in Death" by Chris Claremont, Brent Anderson & Josef Rubenstein

Since Claremont is theoretically the regular scripter of MAN-THING these days, it made sense for him to bring Cyclops in as guest-star, since he's away from the X-Men at present, wandering around à la David Banner. Extra sales for MAN-THING, and a nice bonus for X-Men fans.

(What's that? This is an issue of X-MEN? Well, it surely didn't start off that way, and certainly wouldn't have been if John Byrne hadn't quit the book, and if Manny's own title hadn't been suddenly cancelled. It may say "X-Men" at the front, but let's not judge every book by its cover, shall we?)

So, Scott Summers, by an assortment of coincidences worthy of the Hulk TV show (for "don't make me angry" read "don't jog my sun-glasses"), accompanies this week's female lead back to the family mansion in Citrusville -- only to encounter D'Spayer and, of course, the slime-encrusted star of the book. D'Spayer plays mind games with Cyclops, having him ripped apart by the X-Men, and having his optic beam blast Jean Grey apart at their wedding. But, thanks to Professor Xavier's training, he and Manny come out on top.

It's a good story; but, 2 pages showing the X-Men trying to clean up the damage left by Kitty's valiant battle in #143 notwithstanding, it's not an issue of THE X-MEN. Rubenstein's inks bode well for future issues, though, and Anderson lays down some good pencils, so this year's X-Men Annual is in capable hands. You'll probably like it; it's just a shame that there isn't an issue of X-Men this month.

Looking at the statement of circulation I see that total paid circulation is up 20,000 over the year, with the sales ratio moving from 52.3% to 55.6%; that's good going, yes? Spider-Man may sell half as many copies again still, but his sales ratio is a less-than-Amazing 48.7%. You know, I sometimes think the X-Men must be rather popular these days... -Jonn Hay

2000AD ANNUAL 1981
"The Mumps From Beyond the Moon" by Staccato & Robin Smith; "Ro-Busters" by Chris Stevens & Dave Harwood; "The Man From 2000" by Olah Stepaniuk & D. Hine; "Duel in the Dunes" by Olah & Rob Moran; "Judge Dredd" by A.A. Grant & Brett Ewins; plus reprints of "Guinea Pig", "Smokeman", & "Phantom Patrol".

The cover looked inviting, so I decided to get a copy for my collection. And it's good! The only drawback is that they always seem to print reprints from decades past, some being so old the art is pathetic and the stories dated. There are three reprints in this annual. Shocking!

The Judge Dredd strip near the end would have fitted in perfectly to his own 1981 annual, for the story is on glossy paper and the colour's superb--the story isn't bad either.

Besides the three "Future Shocks", there is also a story with art by Dave Harwood. The art is better than in the special I reviewed in Bem-30--but doesn't yet match his work in Bem. He even puts his initials on a sign to which someone is clinging; very good, Dave.

Other stuff in the book includes text Strontium Dog (good job) and BlackHawk stories, "Hume On My Back" narrated by Ro-Jaws, art by 2000AD readers, an ABC Warriors data-file, an article on how 2000AD is produced, and a story, "'Bang Bang!' Said The Green Cheese Man". Funny. And there's more, of course, packed into this value-for-money book.

Well done, IPC! -Simon Bostock

MAN-THING #9 (March)
"The Echo of Pain" by Dickie McKenzie, Larry Hama & Danny Bulanadi; and "My Soul To Keep" by J.M. DeMatteis, Ed Hannigan & Bob Wiacek

I'm unaware of any of Dickie McKenzie's previous work, but "The Echo of Pain" is an uncomplicated 17-pager about babies, young love, and foul water.

The tale touches superficially upon the bigotry of class structure, but fails to explore the subject other than presenting it as a facet of the characters. Indeed, most of the characterization is poorly defined, relying on reaction to events rather than internal motivation. Therefore, when the characters die, one has little, or no, sympathy for them other than on a shock level. The tale is also somewhat violent to an unnecessarily gratuitous extent, with the Man-Thing being blasted in graphic detail.

The art by Hama is Starlinesque in layout, especially page 2, and on the whole is interesting. -Stephen McGonagle

...The short back-up story seems to be striving to say something, but exactly what I couldn't tell you. A harmless tale of religious sects and mental breakdowns; standard Man-Thing material. The pictures were nice all the same, faintly reminiscent of Alfredo Alcala's Man-Thing in the original series.

Hopefully, this issue will give the title a new lease of life...or is it already too late? -Martin Kravetz

THE NEW TEEN TITANS #6 (April)
"Last Kill" by Marv Wolfman, George Perez, & Pablo Marcos

It's immensely heartening that a new comic can still appear with so much real enthusiasm behind it. Once upon a time, slightly before Gerard F. Conway got his paws on it, the Legion had this force in its soul, and generated a big following both inside and outside fandom; but now the torch has passed to Robin, Starfire, Kid Flash, Cyborg, Wonder Girl, Raven, and Changeling.

George Perez's finely detailed style, and his experience with team books, make the art most collectable. One gets used to what he refers to as his penchant for drawing "zoftig" girls (healthy, well-developed characters, guaranteed to send any female fan off in search of a calory controlled diet, and/or expensive exercise equipment)--and he can certainly fit more action into a page than any other artist at DC these days.

And Marv Wolfman, co-creator/scripter, seems to have found a good berth here; just as well, because put him on the wrong book (Power Man, for instance) and he can be terrible! The action is brisk, the plot advances surely, the background is filled in deftly, the characters interact... No wonder this book has taken off so well, it has something for everyone. I enjoy this title a lot. -C.N. Padgett

BLOODSTAR
"by" Robert E. Howard, "adapted" by John Jakes & John Pocsik; illustrated by Rich Corben. $8.95

Corben has been continually praised for his masterful use of colour. I would agree that he's a fine artist, and is inventive in his use of colour. However, his black & white work has been vastly under-rated. BLOODSTAR is a marvellous example of his monotone capabilities, at least as good, overall, as his very best work in colour. Occasionally, his anatomical work is a disappointment, but that has always been a major flaw in his work. Overall, the artwork is very good, with pages of sheer brilliance; but I still would have reservations about placing Corben with Eisner, Kirby, Hampson etc as one of the all-time great comic artists.

I had thought that "Bloodstar" had been a previously unpublished Howard story only discovered in the past 5 years or so, and then adapted by Jakes into this comic-style form for an illustrated edition. However, it turns out that John Jakes has actually only taken the very basic elements of REH's superb "Valley of the Worm"; the Worm itself, the valley, and the race living there--he has not done a straight adaptation at all. Rather, with additional help from John Pocsik, he has written what might be a prequel or alternate version of the story, and has turned in a truly fine job, too.

A thoroughly enjoyable book, although neither art nor script are perfect.

-Ken Moore

VAMPIRELLA #94 (March)
Vampirella in "Death Mchine" by Rich Margopoulos & Rudy Nebres; "Cassandra St. Knight" by Margopoulos & Auraleon; Pantha in "Druids on 54th Street" by Margopoulos & José Ortiz; "The Big Shot" by Michael Fleisher & Delando Nino; "The Last Gift" by Roger McKenzie & Esteban Maroto; and "Gunplay" by Artifact

A healthy bunch of stories in this issue, six of them in fact. All have good artwork in them, with the exceptions of "Cassandra St. Knight" and "Druids on 54th Street", by two artists I've mentioned before as being rather bland.

Vampirella, created by Forrest J. Ackerman, the world's greatest sf fan, sports super art by Nebres, who has me as a fan at least. Delando Nino's art is good on "The Big Shot", but not as good as Alex Nino's (who I think is a relation), who will always remain one of the greatest. The final story, "Gunplay", is unusual in that the art seems lifelike, and yet it isn't photographic art. Interesting though --wish I could say the same for the story, which is rubbish.

Despite all the criticism, this is still a magazine I recommend. -Simon Bostock

THE MUTANTS -- by Berni Wrightson
"Mother Toad"(script by Terry Bisson); "The Task..."; "Limpstrel"; "The Game That Plays You" (script by Dick Kenson); "A Case of Conscience"; "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (script by Virgil North, with art by Wrightson, Jones & Weiss); "Stake-Out"; "The Reaper of Love"; "Out on a Limb"; untitled ("A Monstrous Overcharge"); "Conjure Woman"; "Maudlin Love Comix"; "Nosferatu" (script by David Izzo): "Ghastly Horror Comix"; and a 17-page portfolio too! Published by Mother of Pearl; $9.95; 96 pages.

This isn't so much a review, just a few words to bring this item to your attention before it sells out. It's a black & white collection of rare Berni Wrightson strips from 1966 to 1972, mainly from fanzines; and in the back, as well as some full-page illustrations from the period, are seven drawings from his "Frankenstein" project, which are alternatives to the ones that will be in that book, and were thus not likely to see print elsewhere.

At around £5.95 for 96 pages plus colour covers, it's a pretty good way to get hold of some very rare work, from about the time Berni broke into DC. "The Game That Plays You" and "Mother Toad" come from WEB OF HORROR #1 & #2; "The Task..." and "The Reaper of Love" come from "Badtime Stories"; the 2-page "Nosferatu" is from MONSTER TIMES #1; and the three 1-page "Limpstrel" stories are from WITZEND #7 and FUNNIEST CARTOONS #1, reprinted in the 1975 "Berni Wrightson Treasury"; "Ghastly Horror Comix" and "Maudlin Love Comix" come from GOTHIC BLIMP #6 & #7; "Stake-out" and "Out On a Limb" are from I'LL BE DAMNED #2 & #4; "Conjure Woman" is from IMAGINATION #1; "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is from THIS IS LEGEND; and where "A Case of Conscience" comes from I can't discover, but as it's the oldest strip (1966), it can't have had much exposure. Unless you've got all these already, this book, in the standard 8½" x 11" format, is rather useful.

Wrightson's style has matured over the years; but even 15 years ago it was recognizable, and all the work here is very interesting, showing a wide variety of techniques. Editor Fershid Bharucha has put together a good volume here for the comic art fan's bookshelf; it's nice to see so much work preserved here for the future. -Ruan Lanihorne

SIGH...

My grateful thanks to David Gryc (love that name) for giving me an excuse to do an easy col (hopefully). His letter in #31, you may recall, complains of "a lack of actual comic talk in Bem"--something I've felt upon occasion. Now, I like talking about comics, I can talk about any given comic for hours--ask Howard Stangroom (who, mind you, can out-talk even me when he tries). But should I do a col along those lines--just chattering away about current comics taken at random? I wouldn't mind. But, would others, I wonder? Let's give it a try here and see.

I'll start off by responding to David's questions which were, in order: 1) "What do you think of Wolverine's new costume?" Er, 's okay I guess. Can't say I care a great deal either way. 2) "What do you think of Ka-Zar coming back in his own comic?" I'm against it--he's dead boring for a start, and one of Marvel's stable of arrogant creeps to boot. Next question. 3) "And what about Avengers #200? Did it live up to your expectations?" What d'you mean "up" to? My expectations were all definitely downwards. (I think Marvel could definitely learn from DC in the matter of 'anniversary issues'.) 4) "What do you think of the new comics currently coming out (eg Teen Titans, Mystery In Space, &c)?" Ah, a question with a bit more scope at last. The new TT I like a lot, in spite of myself, since you asked. Yes, it's mainly a case of the (previously poorly-handled) TT being given an X-Men-type approach, but it's very well done, and of course the art doesn't exactly hurt. Plus it seems to be developing logically, without always doing the expected. Can be a tricky line to walk, and I'm quite pleased with what I've seen so far. Mind, I'd still like to have had more of the old members around, if only 'cause I don't like loose ends; but I can understand the reasoning against. It is a completely different book from the earlier incarnations, and the similarities to before have to be kept to a minimum, to emphasize the point. (I still hope we get to see what became of Mal and Bumblebee and the others some time--for that matter, I'm still kinda curious as to what became of old guest-stars like The Ant, Jericho, the original Starfire, et al.) Yes, all in all I'm in favour of the New TT. And, if the rate of sales at Emlock's tables at recent marts are any kind of indication, it could well be the latest 'cult' item. Howsomever. MIS? Yes, I quite like that--I've always been a sucker for twist-ending stories anyway, and this book seems to be doing well as regards variety, not only in the stories themselves but the line-up of artists and writers too--not half bad. Mind, if the sales should slip at all, I do have an alternative use for the title to suggest. See, I've been thinking for some time that the LSH, with their huge membership, and even huger supporting cast, are really rather cramped in one small book, and a subsidiary one might be helpful...give a little space for solo outings, and the Substitutes, and the trainees in the Legion Academy, &c &c... But I digress. What other new books can I mention before moving on? Moon Knight? Well, if people don't know what I think of this pathetic excuse for a book by now, too bad, 'cause I don't feel like spoiling an otherwise good mood by discussing it. And that goes double for Dazzler... Let's move on to your remaining questions, Dave.

Ah, well, I'm not qualified to answer your questions concerning Bem's sales figures &c, Dave (nosy bugger, ain'tcha?), so I'll skip those. And your last question is specifically directed to Martin anyway, so I'll forget that too... In which case I might as well just get back to chatting about comics in general, I guess. Where did I get to?

Oh, actually, despite what I said before, I will just say a little about Moon Nut. Some people ask what it is I find so objectionable about the series, which after all sports a talented artist, and clever writer, and a visually striking character, with some relatively unusual gimmicks...what's so wrong about all that? We-ell, for a start it's all second-hand. Sienkiewicz is an Adams-copyist, period. Now for artists to be influenced by Adams is one thing, and I'm all in favour of it --but there are limits. Most artists start out by imitating their predecessors' styles, but they generally go on to develop their own. Moench can write original stuff, and/or approach things in a novel way...but there's no evidence of it here. Moony himself did start out quite interesting and different, way back in Werewolf By Night -- but that's all been carefully wiped out, so that he can be a variation on the Shadow and Batman. Add to all that some of the feeble caricatures that pass for supporting characters, and you have a book that I can detest with hardly any effort at all. Oh, and there's his costume too. Now when I was asked to comment on Wolvy's change of outfit, I found I had no real opinion, because to me there seemed no particular significance in the matter...but when it comes to Moony's get-up...well, let me borrow a trick of Keith Glancy's and burst into verse:-

"Dark Avengers of the Night
Should not be clad in gleaming white."

...The point being not so much a question of image -- obviously his outfit does make him look 'spooky', which is fair enough -- as of practicality. When you're sneaking about in the dark, which Moony does a lot, surely the last sort of costume you want is one that actually stands out in the darkness...'specially when there's no shortage of hostile types who would jump at the chance to take a pot-shot at you. (Besides which, wouldn't it get dirty very quickly?) (Well, it is a consideration, isn't it?) Of course it's too late to do anything about it now... ('cept possibly let some 'hostile type' shoot him. That could solve all problems.)

Ah, well, I'd love to stay and chat longer, but I suppose I shouldn't 'impose' on Martin's 'hospitality'. (After all, if I do overrun, he'll only go and cut it back...) Maybe we can have another chat next time--whaddya say?

In parting, let me just toss a question out to you lot: Are comics generally improving--or is it just that I'm mellowing?

See ya.

(Postscripted aside to Keith G: I agree with you about everything -- with the possible exception of Sprite. But then, of course, I've been paranoid for years.) (Still, you know the saying: "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you...") -K. WILLIAMS

MY BABY'S GONE COMIC BOOK CRAZY

That which follows is an essay so boring and pretentious that, in its original form, the text was first sent to The Panologist—some of us never learn. It has to be admitted, though, that this particular treatise on Strip Muzik was initially inspired by Bem. Issue 24's Reaction advised me that people would rather read a poor piece about music than a nothing piece about comics. Instantly, I decided to do the obvious thing—combine a nothing piece about comics with a poor piece on music, under the above title.

Comic strip characters have been fair game for songwriters since the days of Ally Sloper and Barney Google, although this article shall address itself mainly to comical incursions into the rock and roll mainstream, which automatically precludes anything prior to the mid-fifties.

A good place to start, in fact, would be in August 1958 when the Olympics rode "Western Movies" into the American Top 20 (and, two months later, the British Top 20). This was very much a novelty hit and, sadly, their follow-up "Comic Book Crazy" (from whose lyric this feature takes its title) was less of a resounding success. This was partly because the Olympics were working in a vein pretty much sewn up by Leiber and Stoller on their outings with the Coasters. The latter group reached both the British and American Top 10 in 1959 with a song called "Charlie Brown". Although this opus was not directly derivative of the Schultz character, it no doubt benefited from the mass familiarity with its protagonist's namesake.

Since this article is supposedly concerned with characters originating in strips, that should, strictly speaking, pre-empt mentioning that "Roadrunner" is a title applied to 3 separate hits of the fifties, sixties and seventies. However, the author of the fifties "Roadrunner" must have had a special fondness for cartoon characters, as Bo Diddley also recorded a song about George Baker's "Sad Sack".

Shortly after the dawn of the Marvel Age in 1961, two groups with interesting names emerged. In this country, a sort of ersatz Ventures appeared called "The Mighty Avengers", while, in Detroit, a vocal group styling itself "The Fantastic Four" cropped up on Motown and, for that matter, they're still disco-ing around today.

But it was in 1960 that the first really important rock/comics crossover occurred. Jim Fowley, later to call himself B. Bumble and the Stingers and more recently to produce the Runaways, formed a band called the Hollywood Argyles who recorded a tribute to Vincent Hamlin's Alley-Oop. The song had an intentionally "dumb" sound about it and was delivered in a hip West Coast drawl, presumably by someone impersonating a beatnik. Whatever the reasons for its appeal, the composition was a monster success as, while the Argyles' version was topping the U.S. charts, a cover version by Dante and the Evergreens also occupied the Top 20. This second version is of especial interest in the light of the following letter, reproduced from MYSTERY IN SPACE #86, September 1963:-

"Dear Editor,

"I consider myself fortunate to be part of a vocal group called Dante and the Evergreens. As a group we have recorded songs like Alley Oop, Time Machine and Miss America, which have afforded us many thrills & opportunities to travel throughout the entire United States. When I am not singing with the group, I am an assistant coach and an art major in college."

The letter went on to praise Adam Strange and was signed "Don Dante...Santa Monica, California."

The period between Dante's initial success and the day he wrote that letter had seen the rise of Chubby Checker, championing the Twist. In an attempt to keep the silliness going as long as possible, Checker and others maintained a steady flow of records exhorting avid listeners to participate in new dance crazes, each one more absurdly named than the last. It was indicative of the increasing scarcity of suitable dance names when, in late '62, Checker resorted to "the Popeye".

A craze on a parallel with the initial impact of the Twist was the Batman fad of 1966/67. Numerous records came out of this but the only one worthy of note is the "Batman and Robin meet Jan and Dean" album, recorded in the fall of 1965, a few months before Jan Berry's near fatal car accident in April 1966, which left him a virtual human vegetable.

Just as successful as the Batman TV show was the Monkees' series. Former Brill Building mandarin Don Kirshner, on viewing the success of the Beatles' films, had decided to build a TV show around a similar American group. The Lovin' Spoonful had been considered at one stage, but it had been decided too risky to use an existing band — safer to manufacture one and retain full control. Unfortunately for Kirshner, the monster he created eventually became too powerful to control, and so he decided to take his formula one step further. Maybe real people could fight back, but not two-dimensional, imaginary ones.

The raw material Kirshner used to construct the Monkees Mark II could not have been more bland, conventional and further removed from the Beatles. Created by Bob Montana in 1941, Archie was presumably named after the "Archetypal American Teenager". Over almost 30 years he and his cohorts had changed very little, and it was they, in animated form, who "performed" several American hits for Kirshner (although only two ever made the U.S. Top 20). Jeff Barry, one of the men behind the Monkees' success, was their writer/producer and, by any standards, "Sugar Sugar" was a classic single.

Despite the above, the Beatles themselves also turned up on American Saturday morning TV as animated cartoons, but the apex of their animated career was undoubtedly the feature film, "Yellow Submarine". The excuse for its inclusion here is that the film was produced by King Features and, as a consequence, a trio of KFS key properties (Flash Gordon, Mandrake and the Phantom) appear in an early sequence. A further crossover reference is that former Radio 1 dj & Beano artist Alan Black was one of the production team.

Before we get out of 1967, two records deserve especial mention. Donovan's "Sunshine Superman" is not only the most famous record to include Superman in the title, but was also the only song to take Green Lantern's name into the British Top 10 (and to number 1 in the States). 1967 was also the year which saw the only other (with Alley-Oop) perfect use of comics in a rock 'n' roll context. The Royal Guardsmen were obviously a group who'd just come out of the first punk rock wave (note the splendid acknowledgements to the Kingsmen and the McCoys in the instrumental break) and their "Snoopy vs. the Red Baron" was played straight-but-not-too-straight against a judiciously produced background of dogfight sound effects and manic militaristic teutonic chanting.

1968 was a good year for passing references to comics on album tracks; by the Beatles (Captain Marvel) on "Bungalow Bill"; and by the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band (Lord Snooty) on "The Intro and the Outro".

By 1971, it was getting difficult to keep up. A band had popped up on Vertigo called Dr Strangely Strange while, in the U.S., a British duo called Tin Tin took the quaintly titled Maurice Gibb production, "Toast and Marmalade for Tea", into the Top 20.

We haven't had a follow-up flop since the beginning of this article so:- In 1970 a bunch of Chicago students recorded the definitive Blood, Sweat and Tears track--only it wasn't by BS&T, it was by the Ides of March. "Vehicle" went Top 10 in the States...but its successor, "Superman", was the flop I just referred to. A record which met with a similar fate was the 1971 release by the obscure English band, Autumn Vine, "He Ain't Superman--He Can't Fly", my favourite record inspired by that particular ubiquitous character.

In the history of popular music there have been 2 singers with the name "Jackie Lee". One was male, American, smashed in the States with "The Duck" and over here as half of Bob and Earl, and is totally irrelevant to this tale. The other also worked under 2 names, is English, female and her rôle was as follows.

Circa 1970, Mary Tourtel's 1920 creation "Rupert" became famous for 2 reasons. One was his part in a highly publicised trial in which he had been pornographically portrayed in "Oz" magazine. The other was his television début in a stop-motion film series for which Jackie Lee sang the theme song. The record was pretty dreadful and was Ms Lee's only hit apart from another

BBCtv theme song, "White Horses" (under the name, "Jacky").

Also in the early 70's, Marvel made much mileage out of an album by a British band called "Icarus". "The Marvel World of Icarus" was far from earth-shatteringly successful despite such ploys as the group's shock probe feature "Those BBC Requests--Are They Rigged?" in Record Mirror of September 2nd 1972. Judging from that article, Icarus' only real claim to fame was that one of the band was the brother of Frazer Hines, who played Jaimie in "Dr Who".

Incidentally, someone on the R.M. staff at that time was pretty hip to Marvel, judging from the number of mentions that comics group received in the paper's "Face" column. And well before Charles Shsar Murray began his comical series in the N.M.E., Michael Watts wrote a double page spread on Stan Lee which appeared in the Melody Maker of December 9th 1972. But my favourite journalistic Marvel mention was in The Daily Mail in the late 60's. Virginia Ironside, bemoaning the Beatles' psychedelic phase, chose to describe their early singles as "aural equivalents of Marvel Comics."

Aside from the work of Icarus, Bullpen Bulletins pages were eager to direct our attention to such album tracks as Mother Earth's "Marvel Group" and the cover of Pink Floyd's "Saucerful of Secrets" which featured a Marie Severin drawing of Dr Strange buried beneath a photo-montage.

One thing I don't think the B.B. page ever did catch up with was a British band called Brinsley Schwartz. Launched in a blaze of hype at the Fillmore East in 1970, the band were named after the guitarist now playing with the Rumour, and included among their line-up Nick Lowe. Their 1972 album, "Silver Pistol" contains a track entitled "Range War", which includes the invocation "Silver Surfer, help me" in the chorus.

COMIC CATALOG #6 (Summer 1972) contains the following delightful news item: "Just heard from Rob Barrow about the release of a House single (EMI Parlophone) entitled "Capt. America" (released July 14th). In this version, C.A. runs into a room, puts on his costume and flies out of the window; at a later stage he even uses his X-ray vision. It makes you wonder what you've been missing, sometimes..."

At least, when the Mixtures ("Captain Zero"--flop) and Wombles ("Super Womble" --hit) sang about super-heroes, they were kind enough to invent their own.

Someone else who invented a similar character was Elton John on his 1975 "Captain Fantastic" album (although the name may have owed something to Python progenitor, "Do Not Adjust Your Set"). The cover, of course, was provided by "Penguin Book of Comics" co-author Alan Aldridge.

Another famous rock illustrator was Dutch artist, Guy Pellaert. Having found fame in the late 60's on the French pop-art strip "Jodelle", Pellaert combined with English pop journalist Nik Cohn to produce "Rock Dreams", the major rock book of 1974. It was also round about this time that Alex Harvey released his "Impossible Dream" album, with a sleeve design based on comic book covers, and a single called "Sergeant Fury". Snoopy returned to the Top 20 too, via the Hotshots.

Recent years have seen their fair share of comical namechecks from Blondie (Brenda Starr on "Rip Her to Shreds"), Sarah Brightman (Flash Gordon on "Starship Trooper"), and War, who supplied the immortal line, "Superman, Batman getting it on", in "Galaxy".

Finally, the last couple of years have seen 2 major phenomena in this field. To take the least first, Belgian cartoonist Peyo invented Les Schtroumpfs in 1957. They were subsequently renamed for British consumption, used in an advertising campaign, and adopted by some Dutch cretin calling himself Father Abraham to supply three hits in 1978.

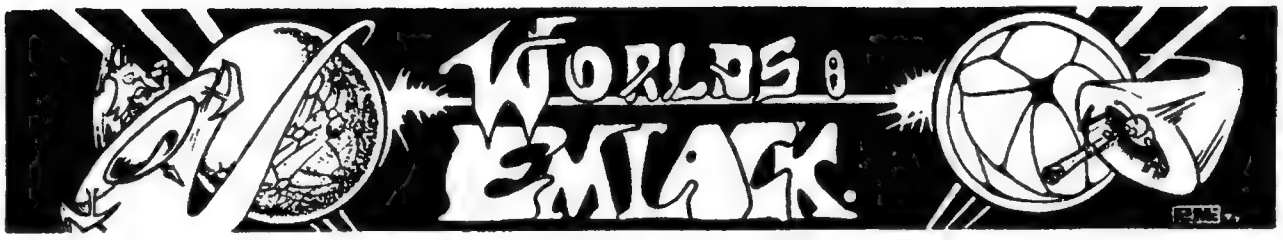
The second, and most important, recent phenomenon was the recorded output inspired by "Superman -- The Movie". Apart from giving the L.S.O. their first British hit with the soundtrack theme (two years after smashing in the States with "Star Wars"), the man of steel provided lyrical inspiration for Herbie Mann and the Kinks, and even brought forth one of Ray Davies' best lines since "Celluloid Heroes"--"I'd like to fly, but I can't even swim."

As a postscript, a clutch of album covers deserve a passing mention: Jack Davis' cover for Sailcat, Neal Adams' cover for the Groundhogs, Rich Corben's cover for Meatloaf, and Mike Royer's covers for the "Cruisin'" series.

The foregoing has been a somewhat informal study of a fairly broadly-defined subject. Any corrections, amplifications or further addenda would be most welcome at Bem's editorial address. And even as I write these final words, Ulster band Starjets' new single is playing on the radio:-

"War stories--Sergeant Fury! War stories --Captain Hurricane!"

Tune in and turn over. -CHRIS ASH



It seems a long time since I last set up for business under the above logo; but I couldn't think what else to fit on this page, and there does seem to be room in Bem this time, so -- we return!

The cover-date is April. This means, of course, that MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #74 is the "Special Christmas Issue" guest-starring Alicia's proud papa, the Puppet Master. With the creative team of Mark Gruenwald, Frank Springer & Chic Stone, the script is better than the act; we meet again Bova (no, not Omni's fiction editor -- the High Evolutionary's nanny!), and the star of MARVEL CHILLERS #1 & #2, Modred...an interesting character in that he's a Marvel hero who gambled, and lost his very mind. The story's uncomplex, and quite fun--in a seasonable way, of course.

Do not pass DOCTOR STRANGE #46 by, just because it credits Kerry Gammill as its penciller. He improves as the story goes on; but, more importantly, there's a 5-page back-up, "A Moment's Peace", written by Stern, inked by Russell, and pencilled & coloured by Golden. Rather good...

A description one can also apply to MICRONAUTS #28, "Last Stand in Fantasy-World". Bill Mantlo's latest Baron Karza epic reaches its climax, with fine art by Pat Broderick, who is definitely the right penciller for the book. Danny Bulanadi's inks don't seem as clear as Armando Gil's --I hope Gil returns next time.

Nick Fury is having a busy month; not only is he up to his eye-patch in the Micronauts story, he's also featured in SPIDER-WOMAN #37, written by Chris Claremont, laid out by Steve Leialoha, and inked by Austin, Wiacek, Weiss, Milgrom, Springer, and anyone else who happened to be passing. But, for X-Men followers, more important is the debut of the new, female Banshee, backed up by her uncle, Black Tom Cassidy, and Cain Marko, alias the Juggernaut. There's also a 2-page scene set in Professor Charles Xavier's school for gifted youngsters, which makes this almost as much an issue of X-MEN as issue #144 of their book... and this is only a lead-in to a major appearance by at least three X-persons next month!

And they're also in DAZZLER #2, by Tom DeFalco, John Romita Jr, & Alfredo Alcala; let's face it, who isn't?

KA-ZAR #1 came out a month later than expected, and with a different cover from the one reproduced in Bem-31; it's less subtle, but perhaps more striking. It's by Bruce Jones, Brent Anderson & Carlos Garzon, though in the comic they prefer to remain anonymous; and who can blame them? Since Ka-Zar's last series was only cancelled to make way for Tarzan, it does make sense to bring him back, and the art is expressive and clean. It's too early to judge this book, I suppose, but it's not very high in my charts yet.

As a last Marvel, MOON KNIGHT #6 is chiefly notable for an Earl Norem painted cover. Inside, Sienkiewicz's art does seem to be starting to distil and break down the Adams influence; see what you think.

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #189 has a beautiful Brian Bolland cover; the fill-in Buckler/McLaughlin art inside has its moments too, for the return of Starro the Conqueror. Also returning this month is Carmine Infantino, who takes back his old post as penciller of THE FLASH with #296, an assignment he left after #174; "The Man Who Was Cursed to the Bone" is written by Cary Bates, and inked by Bob Smith, with Elongated Man as guest-star; it's great to see Infantino back where he belongs. (Now, if he'd only take over Adam Strange on a regular basis too...) And in the back, the Firestorm story pencilled by Jim Starlin concludes.

GHOSTS #99 has stories drawn by Fred Carrillo and Al McWilliams, plus "Death and the Spectre" by Paul Kupperberg, Mike R. Adams and Tony DeZuniga. SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE #35 has both McWilliams and Carrillo too, along with "The Lair of Lady Frankenstein", featuring Mister E, by Bob Rozakis & Dan Spiegle. A nice silly cover has Mister E in Frankenstein pose, with the monster sleeping peacefully in the foreground. WEIRD WAR #98 has a 17-pager by Kupperberg & Noly Zamora about walking sphinxes in World War II (one of the less major hazards, I'm told), plus a strange new wrinkle on Julius Caesar's death by Robert Kanigher, Jan Duursema and Larry Mahlstedt, and a western tale by George Kashdan, Romeo Tanghal & Vince Colletta.

WONDER WOMAN #278 concludes the Kobra plot-line, from Conway, Delbo & Hunt; of more interest as usual is the Huntress 8-pager, by Paul Levitz, Joe Staton & Steve Mitchell. Exciting? Why, it makes the front story look boring by comparison. But then, so does the "Hostess Twinkies" ad. Anyway, I know which feature of the two I enjoy more!

SUPERMAN #358 is a sequel of sorts to that "free" Starlin-drawn computer story sponsored by Tandy/Radio Shack; it does at least have Clark Kent in it, which is more than a lot of recent stories do. In the back is "A Day In The Life of Bruce (Superman) Wayne", a cute Bob Rozakis idea with excellent art by Denys Cowan & Dick Giordano. And that fills the space I've got--including where there should've been some artwork. Oh, well... -MARTIN LOCK

Mal Burns'

UNAMERICAN ACTIVITIES AND SUBTERRANEAN HAPPENINGS

The Christmas season is a peculiar time--like the rock music world, there seems to be little of interest happening. Therefore, this is going to be a short column.

We revealed news of KNOCKABOUT COMICS (#1) and STRIPS '80 in the last Bem. The first item is in the American underground format, and contains a mixture of work by British & Stateside artists. The full colour cover and lead story are by Hunt Emerson, whilst other British contributors are Jerzy Szostek, Graham Manley, Cliff Harper, and Susan Varty. All will be familiar to readers of old ar:zak publications and NEAR MYTHS. These particular items are nothing exceptional, but well suited to this format. Unfortunately, Knockabout's content is very diverse, and it creates little impression of editorial direction. I feel a more consistent mixture of strips (particularly with the USA items) could have been chosen. The book has 36 pages for 75p--not amazing value, but well worthy of support. A second issue is due shortly --with Bryan Talbot amongst the contributors. With luck, the content will improve with future issues, and this recognisable comic format will help get the sales such comics need in this country. The publishers have also released a mail order catalogue of other comics,books, cards & posters -- available from 249/251.

STRIPS '80 is a nice portfolio containing work by most of the top comic professionals working in Britain --it is not as complete as might have been possible, but it is a prestigious and highly collectable item. It costs £2.95 from The Society of Strip Illustration.

Since many copies are due to be sold within the trade and at foreign festivals, it would be advisable to obtain this quickly if you are interested. It is also possible that additional items will be printed for insertion into this loose leaf format at a later date, making the original edition more essential. You can be sure to read the details for subscribing to later contents here.

BROTHER GOOSE COMIC (1) is a 20-page A4 format item published at 50p by Big Flame.

1. No illustrator credit is given, but most pages are signed by someone called Ian. The book contains some interesting humour and political satire that easily compensates for the rather primitive drawing style.

The Health Education Council have now published an 8-page full colour comic under license from DC Comics -- SUPERMAN VERSUS NICK O'TEEN. I will leave it to you to figure out what that's about, but it's got nice cartoon-style art and colouring and comes free, to the best of my knowledge. If you are interested and can't find one, try an SAE to the Council.

Next stop--the Batman against Al O'Kool?

Four issues of a British translation of Jean-Claude Forest's NEW ADVENTURES OF BARBARELLA have been published by Virgin Records as giveaway items in their stores. However, all four books have been bagged together for distribution to comic stores at 95p for the set--which saves buying an album or two. Basically, the books run the second French series of Barbarella--the one after the movie and original book, but before the more recent HEAVY METAL edition. The character's adventures still continue in France, so maybe we will be seeing more of this in English yet.

After all my comments about the DAN DARE television series and its related publishing and merchandising, it now appears that the series has been delayed by a year. I have no idea at present how this will affect the plans of Hamlyn Books, IPC, and other parties.

A few items were squeezed out of the column last time, including two magazine plugs. The eighth issue of HOME GROWN has a 1-page "Smokey Bears" strip by Bryan Talbot. The previous issue also had a 3-pager by Bryan--a one-off piece rendered in the style of Luther Arkwright, and to my mind one of his best. Unfortunately, the magazine itself is becoming a less substantial and more indulgent read, with very little to attract those other than the select audience it caters for.

Also, FLEXIPOP is now on the stands. For 60p, you get a free original flexi-disc by a top band and plenty of visual features in both colour and monotone. These include Rock Art graphics and photo-comic strips starring members of rock bands. Although not strictly something for the comic fan audience, those of you interested in music as well (aren't you all?) will probably find this pretty stimulating stuff.

Since we've some space left, here's a "surprise interview" with Lee Marrs, which was held on 16th February 1979 at the Fantasy Symposium in San José, California. The discussion was led by Clay Geerdes, publisher of COMIX WORLD; Mike Friedrich, then publisher of STAR * REACH, and Craig Russell were also present. -MAL BURNS

An Interview With LEE MARRS

CG: How old are you now, Lee?

LM: 33 years old.

CG: Where are you from?

LM: Montgomery, Alabama.

CG: When did you leave Alabama?

LM: As soon as I could make it. My family lived in a lot of different places. The South and in Europe. So I got out off and on, but rubber-banded back to Alabama.

CG: What provoked you to leave Alabama?

LM: It was against my will. Just when boys had discovered me, my father was offered a better job, so we moved off to Washington, DC.

CG: You were one of those folks who had a rather complete collection of MAD MAGAZINE as a child, weren't you?

LM: Oh, yeah. At first, it wasn't sold in Alabama. It wasn't until the late fifties that it ceased to be contraband. You'd bring it in from Atlanta. Night Bus. I really loved MAD; Harvey Kurtzman in particular. I thought he was great. And Carl Barks, though I didn't know his name at the time. I loved Little Lulu. Much better writing than most anything else that was going on in the media.

CG: What college did you go to?

LM: American University. 1963-67.

CG: What did you do in college?

LM: I worked doing illustrations. I'd always done political cartoons for the school papers since Junior High. The editor of the college paper needed an illustrator for some freelance work he was doing, and he got me jobs with some magazines around Washington, DC. Pretty soon I was doing work for the University, and I had a nice portfolio. I was going to be a political cartoonist. I majored in International Relations, or in "Foreign and Domestic Affairs", as they were called in American University. And in art. Since I was already doing commercial work, what I was most interested in learning were the fine arts, painting and sculpture.

CG: And after college?

LM: I got into television. Because I have an ambisexual name, I discovered that the only way to get in for a job interview was to send xeroxes of my work, even for the local companies. They would figure I was a guy and I'd get in for the interview. A lot of companies didn't hire women in those days. "We run a display shop here in the warehouse, Lady, and I'm afraid having a person such as yourself around would, I dunno, put a damper on things." (laughter)

CG: In other words, they couldn't swear.

LM: Yes, I was such an innocent. Coming out of college I didn't know at first about sexism in hiring. I got the job at the TV station by sending some xeroxes of my work by mail. They said "We need a night shift person, so we can't hire you." I said "But I have a car, and I only live three blocks away!" So, they hired me for ten dollars less a week than they were paying anybody else. I had a good time in television. That was my best straight job. Once you proved you could do the work, they'd let you try anything. I did courtroom sketching, art-directed documentaries, designed animation...

CG: So how did you get into the comics field?

LM: I was trying to get into the comics field before I got out of college. The father of my best friend was and is Tex Blaisdell, who was then doing a lot of newspaper strips. He got me in to see some editors in comics, but they weren't hiring women either. Besides, the factory system struck me as being highly inefficient, debilitating, and resulting in crummy products. So I wasn't really too disappointed. Although I was helping Tex with "Prince Valiant" and "Little Orphan Annie" and other strips when I was in town, I was really learning about a lot of things that I didn't want to happen in my own career. I did not want to do a newspaper strip, because the syndicate owned it and paid you peanuts, and you had deadlines that would kill you, and you could never leave town to go on a vacation. It seemed like a terrible way to spend your time. The comic books had the factory system, so forget that. It wasn't until I came out to California in 1969 that I saw underground comix, and I thought "Oh, good, another comic

industry, I'll try to get into that."

CG: What was the first comic you saw?

LM: I saw them in Gary Arlington's comix book store, a lot of different ones. I wasn't impressed by the quality of any of them, and it wasn't as though I thought "boy, these are terrific! I'd really like to do this!" What I thought was, there are some other companies doing comic books, maybe I can go and see them. So I went around to The Print Mint and Last Gasp and Rip Off, and they all said "Your work is terrific, but you'll have to go and see the artists in order to get into one of their books. We don't put together the books; the cartoonists put together the books." They gave me the addresses of a few people, and I hung out at a few parties -- and this seemed to be a really dumb way to do things. The underground artists were just as exclusively sexist as the over-ground editors. They didn't want to know no girls, neither. It wasn't until we excluded women cartoonists banded together as the Wimmen's Comix collective that I got into comix in 1972.

CG: So tell us about the history of Pudge as a character. When did the character first occur to you? When did you make the first drawing of Pudge?

LM: Probably about 1971.

CG: Did you have any idea that she would become a whole comic book?

LM: Yes, that was why I thought her up. I was out to at least break even financially. What was this supposed to be--creativity? Forget it. The one way to work in undergrounds and break even was by doing a whole comic book yourself. I was inspired by the Furry Freak Brothers situation: at least if you were creating a whole world yourself, and doing all the work in the book, then you would get all of the almost no money. Plus you wouldn't have to hassle as much with other people. Inspired by the newspaper strip work I had done--seeing cartoonists create characters they ran out of ideas for after two years -- I reached the conclusion that the best course to follow was to create a character that was almost completely yourself. Then you could do it forever. If you also had that person experiencing things that were going on in your own life, that would work out fine, too, so long as you could see the character change and grow. I always liked strips like Steve Canyon where the persons would go through changes, and events would happen around them like they do in real life. I drew the character based on that. I drew all of the people living in her house, and those she met, on the basis of San Francisco in the late 1960's.

CG: Was that personal experience? Did you live on a commune?

LM: No. But several friends of mine had. I did, at one time, live in an apartment house with five of the people, and wow --was that communal.

CG: Did you ever have an affair with a cop?

LM: Yes. Well... that affair was only "dating." Nobody went all the way in the sixties.

(laughter)

Not in Montgomery, Alabama!

He was a White House guard.

CG: Really. And what is he in your story?

LM: That's not the character of the person. He actually is ****** *******, a guy who had a crush on me in high school.

CG: So you grew him up and made him a cop.

LM: He was a terrific post. He was drafted into the Army, and I never knew what happened to him.

Once I started writing Pudge, she became this other character. I wanted her to be an alien intellectual fat kid from Montgomery, Alabama, but once I started writing her, she took over and became this much more simple, direct cartoon-like character.

Craig: Working on the same premise, do you think you'll be inspired, say in ten years, from the events of your own life to write another Pudge?

LM: I write Pudge stories all the time. More books depends upon whether I get interested in her enough to draw them again. You do a character all the time, you kind of bum out on it. Right now I'm enthused about the "Stark's Quest" character I'm doing for Star * Reach. I spend a lot of time thinking about her character.

CG: Give a little background on this story.

LM: "Stark's Quest" is a series I started in Star * Reach #11 a few years ago. She's a futuristic character who is telepathic and telekinetic. She moves in an entire world I created, as opposed to the real world of Pudge. Or as the real world of the future. I was interested in social change, and the forces of the universe and the cosmos and that kind of stuff, and (even in the sense that I was dealing with this in Pudge) how people do or don't take responsibility for their lives. How changes effect them. I've always been a fan of science fiction. I've done a lot of spot illustrations, and done a lot of SF artwork without writing science fiction per se. I was really interested in working out a lot of the ideas I have about social change, politics, about personal commitment in some kind of series. I was also interested in doing an adventure character. Though I'm horribly anti-athletic myself, and not really in touch with any of that, the outlook on athletics has changed in America in the last few years. It's not just that everybody's into health and jogging and whatnot, but I've gotten to know teenaged girls who have a much more integrated sense of themselves, are truly much more "together" as people because of how they deal with their bodies. They are what we would in the old days have called athletic. My interest in that kind of integrated personality got me thinking about doing an adventure character. I could never stand the leaping, bounding, hitting people that the superheroes did, but I saw how somebody could be an action-oriented character without necessarily getting into violence. Or without getting it into the manifestations that had already been done in comic books. Those kinds of feelings and thoughts got me into working on the character that ultimately appeared in "Stark's Quest." 1128 Stark.

CG: Summarize a little about the story. What's it all about?

LM: It's about a society in the future, I haven't even decided whether it's Earth or not. After a holocaust which has destroyed most of civilization, a group of city-states evolve. Three groups of citizens have developed. There are the normal people who are called Normals, and (in this particular city-state, although it's not true of other city-states) there are the Inner-gro movement people who are inner-growth development fanatics (pretty powerful), and then there are Mind-Warpers, people who genetically over the years have developed a wide range of telekinetic and telepathic powers. After the holocaust, the warpers ended up being scapegoats for the tragedy, so now they are persecuted minorities. Whereas at one time they were just killed en masse wherever they were detected, now things have gotten a little more mellow. They are currently done in by a process that's used to cure the mentally ill. It's called the Conformity Process. Stark has gone through this process and has lost her memory. She was brought in to solve a murder: they needed a Mind-Warper for it. She comes out the other end solving the murder for them, getting the person who did it, and escaping, but she still doesn't have her memory. Her search for a connection with the past, with her friends, or finding a place in society and starting life all over again (which of course a lot of us have done. Even though some of us do it just by moving from Washington, DC to California) introduces us to her society, which is at a crisis point in its existence. The series as a whole has to do with Stark's personal sense of responsibility. The series questions whether or not an individual can make a difference in society.

MF: How do you approach integrating politics into an entertaining story?

LM: Skillfully and with much subtlety and wit, of course! I try to make it just like it is in real life. Politics gets woven into how people talk to each other. If in the background of your story there are huge video-cube screens that say "Vote for so and so, elect this person", people are not really blind: eventually, they will figure out there's an election going on in the story. One of the tenets of the story is that everybody is evaluated not only in the usual economic strata ways, but on the basis of their mental balance. A lot of the greetings we have are based on being healthy. The use of "Hello" comes from things about good health. Goodbye means God Be With You. In Stark's society, when people meet each other they say "Harmony to you" or "Harmony." People will talk about balance. When someone says "How are you?" another will say, "Well, I'm pretty stable now, but I've been a little erratic all month." People talk about relating and coping, and I just build it all into the dialogue. There are aspects of the police-state in here, too, the handy men who go around with mind-scanners tracking down--

CG: Orwellian--

LM: Yes, I see that happening as a parallel with the get well-feel good, me generation cults. It's all going on in a parallel fashion. It's not as though all society is going along in one direction. All society is travelling in about five different directions at once. Repressive and liberating trends proceed side by side in our own lives, always have. In building another world as complex as our own, I get a chance to have complete control--unlike the world in which I have to live.

MF: I'd kind of like to hear about the starting points in your work, the artistic references.

LM: When I was very young, Joe Kubert was my absolute love. He did things like draw people from totally above so that there was...perspective! I moved on from comic books to hardcover books pretty early on, so I really don't have comic book artist references like most people do for the adventure stuff. MAD MAGAZINE is a source of my funny work. My reference in doing the more straight style is movies. I think of all comic books as just being slower movies. I like Alfred Hitchcock a lot. That's one reason why I'm so interested in getting into animated films. I am working in animated films. That's the next step. All these things you use in comics are making the pictures move--in people's heads.

Fan-Things

STARLIGHT ≠2 seems a good place to start; with 28 A4 pages for 55p by post from Max O'Connor,

it's an impressive second issue, and a great improvement on ≠1, which itself was pretty good. There's a strong cover by Dave Hornsby, and some good art inside this time, notably three large pictures by Don Wazejewski, and a selection by Dean Willetts; there's a 2-page Mark Casto strip, lots of zine reviews, a con report, part two of their dealers guide, "Iron Man Rules--F.E!" by Geoff Lamprey, results of a survey, letters, a short story, part two of the "Black Dragon" strip (enlivened slightly by having the pages in the wrong order), and assorted reviews. With the inventive layouts and extra-neat typing, this zine reminds me of The Panelologist; may its career be as illustrious, and if possible rather longer!

On the debit side, an announcement came in that FANTASY MEDIA has ceased publication, and that the Aug-Sept issue was the last one. Back issues are still available, if you want to complete your set -- they're 65p each, or £1.50 for any three, from David A. Sutton.

Send an s.a.e. for details, they say.

John Green, in a more recent letter than the one in Reaction, gives an unsolicited testimonial for SAGA, details of which can be had for an s.a.e. from Alan Pinder.

It is, it seems, a really good little fanzine. Okay, John, ask Alan to send a copy to Bem if he wants it reviewed here; what we don't see, we can't go into great depth about. And Howard Stangroom (of whom more later) commends to our attention a shop called Starship Atomica, at 80 High Northgate, Darlington, County Durham. "Wide variety, friendly if chaotic atmosphere, & peculiar, but generally reasonable, prices. Only thing to watch out for is the savage cat..."

OGRE ≠7 25p by post for 24 A5 pages from Colin Gould,

doesn't have a letter from Ms Yronwode this time (sometimes my subtle links between paragraphs surprise even me); it has a beautiful Bob Wakelin cover, review articles on Michael Whelan's "Wonderworks" (by Luke Rainford) and Bill Griffith's "Zippy the Pinhead" by Pete Scott, the confessions of someone who once tried to write for D.C. Thomson, a hatchet critique of Starburst by Ian Trotter, a comic mart calendar with 26 dates spread through 1981 (though see that neat little box below for one revision), fanzine reviews, and 9½ pages of letters, plus a rallying cry from Ian Abrahams, and a fine back cover by Alan Davis. Oggy's a "top five" fanzine these days; I'd suggest that you go in for a £1, four-issue subscription.

PSI 12 A5 pages for 5p + s.a.e. from Ed Bagwell.

is a neatly typeset little zine with an article on Star Trek and an interview with Bob Shaw and Harry Harrison, both by Brian M. Clarke. At the price, well worth checking out --it's a first issue, and thus worthy of your encouragement.

COMICBOOK MARKETPLACE

Due to circumstances beyond our control, the next event will now be on MARCH 14TH, and not February 28th.

CHEESECAKE ≠3 cover price 30p -- you might be well advised to add about 15p p & p--for 24 A5 pages from Nazer Alikhan,

is, as usual, a stylish package. There's a 6-page "Mantis Prey" strip by Nazer, plus the 6-page climax of "The Returning" by John Frankish. Another 6 pages are taken up by a rap session between Nazer and Dave Brock, the mainstay of Hawkwind; there's an editorial, a page of comments from the readership, a page of comments by John Frankish on his just-completed trilogy ...and there are covers, too, the back one featuring a mega-city judge smoking a hand-rolled aromatic cigarette (he said innocently). It's not an easy zine to categorize...it's not even all that easy to understand sometimes, but it well repays re-reading.

I've had no response from Sean Egan, organizer of the 2000AD Society, since the note I quoted last time about him "dropping out & going underground". The first issue of BLOODBLADE (32 A4 pages) has appeared though, and also, as a 1-page news-sheet, FRIENDS OF THARG ≠3. BLOODBLADE announces that the membership list will be closed once the tooth sock has 50 members; if you wish to enquire whether Sean has reached that number yet, and/or whether he is "dropping out",

BLOODBLADE itself has letters, strips, features on Judge Cal and the Stainless Steel Rat, and a lengthy interview with AALN-1, conducted I think before the one in Bem-29 but still engrossing. A little reminiscent of Cerebro in fact, though Sean's editorial personality is less benign than good ol' Geoff.

CEREBRO ≠10 34 A4 pages, plus 6 A4-page X-INDEX devoted to Havoc, for 40p by post from G.F. Willmetts,

is the latest issue I have to hand--though ≠11 is probably due any day now, at 45p. If you like X-Men, this is the zine for you, and moments after you finish reading your first issue you'll be writing out your cheque for £3.00, for a year's membership of the X-Men Fan Club, of which Cerebro is the official clubzine. There's even a report on the Club's recent visit to Regent's Park Zoo; I hope they dropped by the cage of the wolverines!

COMICS '80 ≠15 12 8½" x 11" pages for 30p by post--sea mail, I imagine--from Brian R-Flynn,

is an American newszine mainly; if an enterprising dealer stocks it, look it over, but to send off to America for copies would be more trouble than it's worth for such a relatively thin prize. And Brian, in both "villian" and "Britian", most of us put the "i" and "a" the other way round! COMICS NEWSLINE ≠19 is also one of The Comic Reader's less slick competitors with 24 7¼" x 11" pages, from Frank Verzyl,

and you may find copies on Rob Barrow's tables at London marts. It's printed on poor-quality newsprint, with 7 pages of ads, and 12 pages of Marvel and DC news, liberally padded with cover repros. You'd have to be a really dedicated news-freak to want to know all this every month -- but there are still a lot of 'em around.

The second round ballot form for the 1980 "Fan Achievement Awards" is now available from Bem's editorial address, among other places (for an s.a.e.--and remember it's 11½p, or 14p, now), if you don't get a copy from one of the numerous distributors. In the "Favourite New Fanzine" category, the candidates are AMON SPEK, CYGNUS ALPHA, RABBITS TEND TO EXPLODE, STARLIGHT, and THE ALTERNATIVE HEADMASTER'S BULLETIN; as the deadline for returning the forms isn't until the end of May, you've got time to do a little research if you've not tried 'em all yet. There's no room to do a full run-down of the other 8 categories here, and to give only some of the candidates wouldn't be fair. So seek out a copy, and fill it in; a lot of work goes into producing fanzines, from some very talented writers, artists and even editors, and this is the best way we've got of saying "well done" to some rather fine people. (And send the form in, too...or you can hand it over at the Martin Lock tables at the London comic marts and comicbook marketplaces, to save postage.)

NOUMENON ≠39/40 28 7¼" x 10" pages; a 10-issue subscription costs £4 by sea or £7.50 by air, via UK Agent Keith Walker,

while the editorial address is Brian Thurogood, 40 Korora Rd, Oneroa, Waiheke Island, Hauraki Gulf, New Zealand) is the latest issue of this most enjoyable SF fanzine. I find it invaluable for its news of awards (this time lists the latest Locus Poll Awards, the Hugos, the British Awards (chosen by members of the BSFA and Albacon), the John W. Campbell Memorial Award, and the Film Awards), SF publishing, & con news; there's also an account of Anne McCaffrey's recent visit to NZ, always interesting letters, sundry articles, and film and book reviews.

Talking on the phone to Dick Domar, it seems that THE OWL'S EFFORT ≠9 will be out by the time you read this (lots of A6 pages for 35p by post from Dick;

besides the usual features and the longest lettercol this side of TCJ. there are lots of comics for sale at Dick's always-reasonable prices. A lot of DCs this time, I gather, and also a good number of underground comics, so, your 35p might be a good investment. Or why not subscribe? Dick will send you 9, 10 & 11 for £1, as they come out.

ART CREDITS

Chris Ash: 30; Leigh Baulch: 21; Brian Bolland: 1 (inks); Laurence Bowkett: 13 (right); Mark Casto: 2 (strip); Hon Fai Chan: 2 (top); Ben M. Crozier: 25; Hunt Emerson: 29; Dave Harwood: 1 (pencils), 7-11; Kevin Hopgood: 23; Alan Hunter: 27 (top); B.J. Martin: 27 (strip); Mike Matthews: 14; Russ Nicholson: 17; Adrian Salmon: 28; Cameron Smith: 16, 26; Superswipe: 34; Superswipe's Second Cousin: 12, 13 (left); Colin Wilson: 15.

CYGNUS ALPHA #3 35p for 16 A5 pages by post from Paul West,

came through in January, with a moody Dalek wrap-around cover by Graham Bleathman, who also contributes a 2-page SF strip continuing "Star City Exeter" from a stripzine that Graham used to produce, MEANWHILE. There's also a 5-page strip by Phillip Greenaway and Bob Watkins, "Compu-Rob", part 1 of an interview with David Martin (Dr Who scriptwriter and creator of K-9), letters, and the conclusion of a short interview with comics dealer Derek Larkin. Paul has fitted a lot in here--and next time he takes over "The 2nd British Empire" strip from the now-defunct MAGAZINE OF TOMORROW, so he'll need more pages, and therefore more purchasers. A new zine, rapidly improving from a promising start--just the sort of thing we need!

COMIXINE #5 50p for 36 A5 pages by post from Howard Stangroom,

has, as the Big H mentions in his editorial, a "somewhat cobbled-together appearance", caused by taking in a lot of material that had been scheduled for THE COMIC REVIEW (subscribers of which should watch Bem for a near-future settling-up). There are a horde of short articles by such notables as Kathleen Glancy, Theo Clarke, Maureen James, Ivo Steyn, and even K. Williams; art includes a John Byrne/Duffy Vohland back page Howard bought at the Marvel Con, and a full-pager of Wonder Woman after the laundry forgot to starch her costume, by Joe Staton. Nigel Kitching contributes the strips, the readers contribute 6 pages of letters...all in all, plenty of interesting reading.

FEATURE ZINE #7 has 20 A5 unreduced pages, all printed sideways for 20p by post, from Steve Jones,

it's a strange effect, which, since it's a special Dr Strange issue, is quite appropriate. Douglas Angel gives his view of the series; Max O'Connor concentrates on his latest series in his own title; Alec Chalmers on the Strange art of Tom Sutton; & Nick Hay talks of Doc's time in The Defenders. It's a well thought-out selection. And if you've ever wanted to send in a contribution to a fanzine, but dreaded being rejected, try Feature Zine, because the policy here is <u>not</u> to reject anything. Oh, and Steve is also in charge of the "Fanzine Clearing House", a system by which you can get a number of different zines in one fell swoop, instead of having to write lots of letters and get lots of fiddly little postal orders. So send him an S.A.E. for details. Unfortunately, they've decided not to include the bigger-circulation zines in this service, so you can't get such fanzines as (I assume) Cerebro, Masters of Infinity, Bem, or Fantasy Trader by this method.

MENTOR is a (20 A5 pages) Dr Who fanzine put together by Paul Trainer & Richard Starkings; I imagine 30p would get you a copy, from Paul.

It's mainly fiction, with good-looking art; if you go to marts, you ought to be able to pick up a copy from the Direct Magazine Supplies table--they're the ones who sit quiet and good behind their table, watching "Tiswas" on their portable TV, so they'd probably charge you either 20p or a flan in the face...

BULLETIN DU SFFAN appears monthly, and is distributed free to members of SFFAN--membership of which costs 30 French France per annum, from Jean Milbergue.

The latest issue, #38, came in four sections with a total of 92 A5 pages. Since they keep sending Bem copies, I just thought I'd mention it. If you want to make contact with French SF fandom, get in touch with Jean.

One hears good reports of the sf conventions held in Glasgow, and I gather that a number of familiar faces will be making the trek there for 24th-27th July, for FAIRCON '81. Attending membership, booked before Easter, costs £8.00; more details can no doubt be gained from Faircon, or I'm sure Lilian Edwards (see page 17) would be able to supply advice.

The solution to almost anything, though, is to send 40p to Paul Schofield (writes Andy Cottingham, with an assurance that he doesn't make a penny out of it).

In return for this you would shortly receive a copy of MACH 3 COMIX #3, and definitely <u>not</u> "The Secret of Yen and the True Answers to the Cosmic Mystery (Part Two)"... (Or did he mean "Zen"?)

It was ever thus. -ED SALLIS

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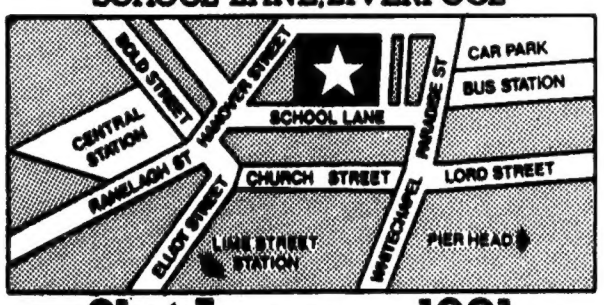
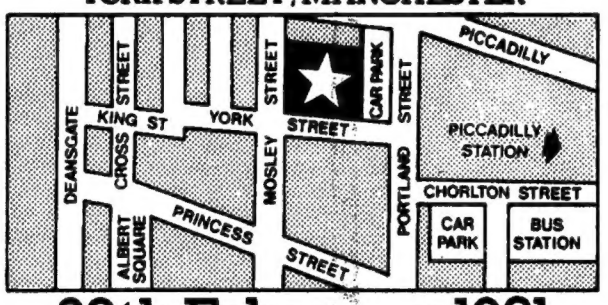


31st January 1981

1981 DATES
14th March ★ 30th May
26th July ★ 19th September ★ 5th December

MANCHESTER

PICCADILLY PLAZA EXHIBITION HALL
YORK STREET, MANCHESTER



28th February 1981

1981 DATES
★ ★ 18th April, ★ ★
Future dates to be announced.

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